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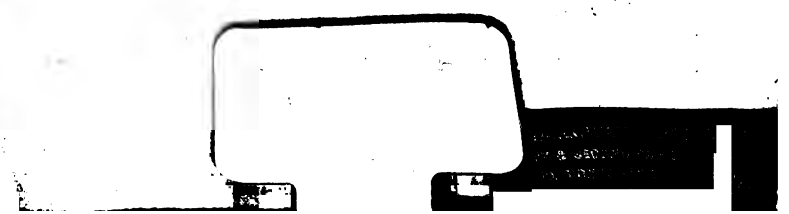

FOUR

DISSERTATIONS.

I. ON PROVIDENCE.

II. ON PRAYER.

III. On the REASONS for expecting that virtuous Men ſhall meet after Death in a State of Happineſs.

IV. On the Importance of CHRISTIANITY, the Nature of HISTORICAL EVIDENCE, and MIRACLES.

By RICHARD PRICE, D. D. F. R. S.

The THIRD EDITION, with ADDITIONS.

LONDON:
Printed for T. CADELL, in the Strand.
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THE Author has beſtowed ſo much pains on the *Firſt* of the following *Diſſertations*, that he hopes it will be found worthy of careful attention. His view in the *Second* and *Third Diſſertations* is in a great meaſure *Practical*; and he begs this may be remembered, and that ſuitable allowances may be made when they are read. He wiſhes earneſtly to be able to contribute towards advancing the intereſt of virtue and rational religion in the world; and he will think that his life has been ſpent to a

valuable purpoſe, ſhould he ever ſucceed in this in the ſmalleſt degree.

The *Fourth* Diſſertation is deſigned chiefly in anſwer to an objection againſt Chriſtianity, on which conſiderable ſtreſs has been laid. It is, perhaps, too foreign to the main end of this work. There cannot, however, be any great impropriety in giving it a place here.

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TO THE

SECOND EDITION.

THE principal corrections and additions in this Edition are the following. In Page 136 a Note is added to explain an aſſertion which has been miſunderſtood.—The latter part of the Second Section of the Fourth Diſſertation, the long Note from Page 442 to 453, and the three laſt Pages are alſo additions.—Every expreſſion likewiſe in that Diſſertation which had any appearance of an undue ſeverity with reſpect to Unbelievers has been altered.—The Author is ſenſible that there are few or no controverſies in which it is right to charge an adverſary with want of candour and diſingenuity. Such charges give no ſtrength to an argument. They always irritate inſtead of doing good, and it ſeldom happens that they are not capable of being retorted.

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DISSER-

DISSERTATION I.

ON

PROVIDENCE.

DISSERTATION I.

ON

PROVIDENCE.

SECTION I.

Of the arguments for Providence from the perfections of the Deity.

IT cannot but be a matter of anxious enquiry with every conſiderate perſon, how far he has reaſon to think well of that world in which he exiſts, and of its laws and adminiſtration. If about this no ſatisfaction can be obtained, there will be an end of all the chief comforts and hopes of reaſonable beings. The courſe of events muſt be viewed with ſuſpicion, and the world contemplated with diſguſt and

pain. The doctrine of Providence, therefore, is plainly of the higheſt importance; and the writer of the following Diſſertation can want no apology for attempting to aſſiſt in explaining and defending it, though he ſhould fall ſhort of his aim, and be able to do no more than ſhew a good intention, and perhaps engage a few to join with him in carefully reviewing a ſubject that cannot too often employ our thoughts.

What I ſhall begin with will be an account of ſome of the principal arguments that prove an unerring Providence.

If it can be proved that the Deity adminiſters *all* the affairs of the world, and extends his care to *every* created being in ſuch a manner that nothing hard or oppreſſive, nothing inconſiſtent with rectitude and wiſdom in the government of events ever comes to paſs; or, in other words, if it can be proved "that all the occurrences in nature "are under perfectly wiſe and good direc-"tion;" then the doctrine of Providence,

in

in the higheſt and ſtricteſt ſenſe of it, will be eſtabliſhed.

There are two ways of proving this. One, from the conſideration of the Divine perfections. The other, from what falls under our notice of the frame and conſtitution of the world. Let us firſt conſider the evidence ariſing from the former of theſe heads.

We have the beſt reaſons for aſcribing to the Deity all poſſible excellence; or for conceiving of the firſt cauſe as a Being abſolutely perfect. In the idea of abſolute perfection is implied infinite power, wiſdom, and goodneſs; and in theſe, ſuch a providence over all things as has been mentioned. The Deity cannot be an indifferent ſpectator of the ſeries of events in that world to which he has given being. His goodneſs will as certainly engage him to direct them agreeably to the ends of goodneſs, as his wiſdom and power enable him to do it in the moſt effectual manner. Thus we muſt

conclude according to all our ideas of theſe attributes. Could we call that Being good who would refuſe to do any good which he is able to do without the leaſt labour or difficulty?—God is preſent every where. He ſees all that happens; and it is in his power, with perfect eaſe, to order all for the beſt. Can he then poſſeſs goodneſs, and at the ſame time not do this?—I am, ſuppoſe, in affliction. The author of my exiſtence, who is almighty and righteous, knows my condition, and ſees what I feel. Would he, if he ſaw that my affliction is improper, or that I labour under any real grievance, ſuffer it for one moment? 'Tis utterly impoſſible.—A God without a Providence is undoubtedly a contradiction. Nothing is plainer than that a Being of perfect reaſon will, in every inſtance, take ſuch care of the univerſe as perfect reaſon requires. That ſupreme intelligence and love which are preſent to all things, and from whence all things ſprung, muſt govern all occurrences, and exclude from the conſtitution of nature all real ill and diſorder.

Theſe

Theſe conſiderations, it ſhould be obſerved, prove what has been called a *particular* in oppoſition to a *general* Providence. We cannot conceive of any reaſons that can influence the Deity, to exerciſe *any* providence over the world, which are not likewiſe reaſons for extending it to *all* that happens in the world. As far as it is confined to generals, or overlooks *any* individual, or *any* event, it is incomplete, and therefore unſuitable to the idea of a perfect Being.

A great deal of very fooliſh ridicule has been thrown on this ſubject, and ſeveral objections have been made, which prove no more than the ignorance of thoſe who make them. It will be proper here diſtinctly to take notice of ſome of theſe.

One common prejudice againſt this doctrine ariſes from the apprehenſion that it is below the dignity of the Deity to watch over, in the manner it implies, the meaneſt beings, and all the minuteſt affairs. In anſwer to this it may be obſerved, that a

great number of minute affairs, if they are each of them of *ſome* conſequence; make up a ſum which is of *great* conſequence; and that there is no way of taking care of this ſum, without taking care of each particular. Whatever events indeed are *wholly frivolous*, it would be abſurd to ſuppoſe the Deity to concern himſelf about. Such events *want* no direction. They are *capable* of no direction. But, on the contrary, all events, not wholly frivolous, are proper objects of attention; and what would be really degrading to the univeral parent is, not his watching over, but neglecting them. This objection, therefore, under the appearance of honouring God, plainly diſhonours him. Nothing is abſolutely trifling wherein the happineſs of any individual, even the moſt inſignificant, is at all concerned: nor is it beneath a wiſe and good Being to interpoſe in any thing of this kind. To ſuppoſe the Deity above this, is to ſuppoſe him above acting up to the full extent of goodneſs and rectitude.

The

The ſame eternal benevolence that firſt engaged him to produce beings, cannot but engage him likewiſe to exerciſe a particular providence over them; and the very loweſt beings, as well as the higheſt, ſeem to have a kind of right to his ſuperintendency, from the very act of bringing them into exiſtence. Every apprehenſion that this is too great a condeſcenſion in him, is founded on the pooreſt ideas; for, ſurely, whatever it was not too great a condeſcenſion in him to *create*, it cannot be too great a condeſcenſion in him to *take care of**. It is proper

* Αλλ' εἰ ὡς ευτελων καταφρονει τυτων απερ ηξιωσε παραγαγειν, ωςε κατα παντα τροπον αδυνατον μη προνοειδαι υποθευ τα υπ' αυτυ παραχθεντα. Sim. Comment. Cap. 38.

Some of the obſervations which have been made above, may be found alſo in Plato's well-known 10th Dialogue of Laws. In this dialogue, Plato teaches excellently that (ſince what is ſelf-moving is, by its nature, *before* that which moves only in conſequence of being moved) *mind* muſt be *prior* to *matter*, and the cauſe of all its modifications and changes; and that, therefore, there is an univerſal mind poſſeſt of all perfection, which produced and which actuates all

per to add, that with reſpect to God all the diſtinctions of high and low in the creation vaniſh.

all things —— εκ γε των ειρημενων ουδ' οσιον αλλως λεγειν η πασαν αρετην εχουσαν ψυχην περιαγειν παντα. — After this he ſhews that the Deity exerciſes a particular providence over the world, taking care of ſmall no leſs than great things. Ως επιμελεις σμικρων εισι θεοι, ουχ ητ[τ]ον η των μεγεθει διαφερoντων. In proving this he obſerves, "that a ſuperior nature of ſuch "excellence as the Divine, which hears, ſees, and "knows all things, cannot in any inſtance be ſub-"ject to negligence or ſloth; that the meaneſt and "the greateſt parts of the world are all equally his "work or poſſeſſion; that great things cannot be "rightly taken care of without taking care of "ſmall; and that, in all caſes, the more able and "perfect any artiſt is, (as a phyſician, an architect, "or the ruler of the ſtate) the more his ſkill and care "appear in little as well as great things. Let us "not then (ſays he) conceive of God as worſe than "even mortal artiſts." Ουδε γαρ ανευ σμικρων τας μεγαλας φασιν οι λιθολογοι λιθους ευ κειϑαι —— μη τον γε θεον αξιωσωμεν ποτε θνητων δημιουργων φαυλοτερον: οι τα προσηκοντα αυτοις εργα οσω περ' αν αμεινους ωσι τοσω ακριβεστερα και τελεωτερα μια τεχνη σμικρα και μεγαλα απεργαζονται. The chapter in *Simplicius* juſt quoted contains many obſervations ſimilar to theſe, and well deſerves to be conſulted.

vaniſh. All beings are *infinitely*, that is, *equally*, inferior to him.

Another prejudice by which, probably, the minds of many are affected on this ſubject, ariſes from the notion, that it muſt be ſome trouble to the Deity to ſuperintend and direct all the immenſe variety of events in the univerſe. It is not eaſy in this inſtance to avoid conceiving of God as like ourſelves, and to remove all human imperfections from our ideas of him. We ſhould ſtudy this as much as we can, and take care always to remember that the whole of poſſibility is alike eaſy to *infinite* power and knowledge; and that it is a contradiction to imagine that they can be ever encumbered or perplexed.

But the objection of moſt conſequence is that taken from the ſuppoſed inconſiſtency of a particular providence with the liberty of reaſonable agents, and the general laws of the world. This objection may be ſeen excellently anſwered in *The Religion of Nature delineated*,

delineated, Sect. V. where it is ſhewn, how by ſecret influences on the minds of men; by the introduction of different characters on the ſtage of the world at proper times, and in proper places; by the miniſtry of inviſible beings, and a ſuitable adjuſtment of phyſical and moral cauſes and events to one another, it may be poſſible, conſiſtently with the laws of nature and the liberty of mankind, to direct all occurrences in ſuch a manner, that nothing on the whole unfit to be allowed, or unſuitable to any caſe, ſhall come to paſs.—In ſhort: Concerning every event we may reaſon thus. Either it is of importance, or it is not. As far as it is not of importance, ſo far it is no object of concern to any being. As far, on the contrary, as it is of importance either in itſelf, or its circumſtances, or on account of its influence on other events; ſo far, as already obſerved, it is worthy of notice and regard, and it would imply imperfection in the adminiſtration of nature that the courſe of events ſhould be ſo regulated as to admit it, ſuppoſing it on any account not proper to be admitted.

admitted.—The opinion that ſuch a *particular* direction of events is not poſſible, without breaking in upon free agency and the laws of the univerſe, ſhews, I think, narrow views. It would, indeed, be impoſſible, if a man, for example, happens to be under a wall when it is falling, to prevent his being killed, without ſuſpending the law of gravitation: But how eaſy would it have been, had his death at this particular time, and in this particular manner, been an event proper to be excluded, or which was not conſiſtent with exact order and righteouſneſs in the regulation of events; how eaſy, I ſay, in this caſe, would it have been to hinder him from coming too near the dangerous place, or to occaſion his coming ſooner or later, by inſenſibly influencing the train of ideas in his mind, and in numberleſs other methods, which affect not his liberty. And ſince this was *eaſy* to be done, and yet *was* not done, we may aſſuredly conclude that it was not *right* to be done, and that the event did not happen with-

without the counſel and approbation of Providence. In general, every perſon whenever any event, favourable or unfavourable, happens to him, has the greateſt reaſon to own the Divine hand in it; becauſe, it appears, as far as we can judge, that had the Deity ſo pleaſed, it might have been prevented by a ſecret direction of natural cauſes, and of the thoughts of men, without offering any violence to them. How plainly may we perceive, that if we ourſelves had a greater acquaintance with the powers of nature, and nearer acceſs to the minds of men, we could eaſily over-rule and direct many events not at preſent in our power, agreeably to our own purpoſes, without the leaſt infringement of the general laws of the world, or of the liberty of mankind? But how much eaſier muſt it be for that Being to do this abſolutely and perfectly, to whom all the powers of nature are ſubject, who ſees through all dependencies and connexions, and has conſtant acceſs to the heart of every man, and can turn it whitherſoever he

pleaſes* ? Where then can be the difficulty of believing an inviſible hand, an univerſal and ever-attentive Providence, which guides all things agreeably to perfect rectitude and wiſdom; at the ſame time that the general laws of the world are left unviolated, and the liberty of moral agents is preſerved?

With reſpect, particularly, to general laws, and the inconveniences commonly ſuppoſed to be inſeparable from them, we may conceive that none would be at firſt eſtabliſhed which would produce any inconveniencies

* We are, I believe, more ignorant than is generally imagined of the manner in which ideas ariſe within us, and of the cauſes on which the ſucceſſion of them in our minds depends. By this ſucceſſion, the courſe of events in the world ſeems to be in a great meaſure determined; and he who had the complete management of it might give riſe to almoſt any events he deſired, at the ſame time that men went on to think, and judge, and act from themſelves as they do now. But who can ſay how far it may be actually influenced by the ſuggeſtions of inviſible beings, and particularly by the ſecret agency of the ſupreme Spirit?

veniencies not right, all things conſidered, to be allowed: or, that ſuch would be eſtabliſhed whoſe inconveniencies might even become occaſions of good, as the afflictions of human life have a tendency to bring men to ſobriety and thoughtfulneſs, and to teach them ſome of the moſt important virtues. Or, ſuppoſing the inconveniencies ariſing from any neceſſary general laws to be in themſelves abſolute evils, we may conceive that there may be direction in various ways, with reſpect to the inſtances in which they ſhall happen; or that remedies may be provided for them in the original conſtitution by particular ſecondary laws, as the inconveniencies attending the abſence of the ſun are remedied by the lights with which we can furniſh ourſelves in the night, or as the ill effects which would often ariſe from gravity and other natural cauſes, are prevented by the powers and inſtincts with which animals are endowed. It is, without doubt, abſolutely neceſſary that natural cauſes ſhould operate uniformly and ſteadily. Were they liable to frequent interruptions, the regularity

larity of nature would be deſtroyed; there would be no room for the exerciſe of prudence and foreſight, and an univerſal inactivity would take place among reaſonable beings. If then it ſhould be true, that ſome evils are impoſſible to be ſeparated by any methods from the uniform operation of any law of nature neceſſary to the general good, ſuch evils only render this law ſo much leſs good, while yet it may be the beſt poſſible, and the impoſſibility of preventing them without greater harm, becomes itſelf a ſufficient vindication of Providence in permitting them, and renders them entirely conſiſtent with, nay *inſtances* of, a perfect order in the oeconomy of the univerſe.

In a word. It is ſelf-evident that if there is *one* event in nature, of which all the care is not taken that is *right* to be taken, the adminiſtration of the world is *ſo far* defective, and the character of its author imperfect. It will be a contradiction to ſay, in anſwer to this, that there are cauſes and reaſons,

which render it not *poſſible* to take ſuch care of *every* event; for the care *right* to be taken can be no other than all the care *poſſible* to be taken. It follows, therefore, that no one who believes a perfect Deity can deny a Providence, or doubt whether it is *particular*.

Leſt I ſhould not find a properer place, I ſhall beg leave to add here, as ſome preſumption in favour of ſuch a perfect order in nature as a particular Providence implies, that there is in *order* and *right* an eſſential tendency to get the aſcendant over their contraries. They imply in their natures ſuperior *force*, *ſtability*, and *permanency*; whereas, *confuſion* and *wrong* as ſuch are neceſſarily *weak*, *unſtable*, and *ſelf-deſtructive*. This alone, I think, might be ſufficient to engage an attentive mind to believe, previouſly to any conſideration of the actual ſtate of the world, that the former rather than the latter, muſt be likely to be prevalent in it. But, perhaps, we may with reaſon proceed further in this way of thinking. The very

notion

notion that there is *any* circumſtance in the courſe and adminiſtration of the world as it *ſhould not* be, appears to me to be ſelf-evidently incredible. It implies an impoſſibility like that of deſtroying ſpace and duration; for it implies the non-exiſtence of what cannot even in thought be deſtroyed; of *infinite, omnipotent,* and *everlaſting reaſon* and *goodneſs*. While we conceive theſe to remain, (and otherwiſe we cannot conceive without a contradiction) we muſt believe that every thing repugnant to them, or not allowed by them, is excluded from nature *.—But let this be as it will. It ſeems to

* It would take up too much time as well as lead to a ſpeculation too abſtruſe for the preſent diſcourſe to explain my full meaning here, or to ſhew that we have an intuitive perception of the exiſtence of *infinite, everlaſting, omnipotent intelligence* and *rectitude*, which like eternity and immenſity we cannot deſtroy, but remain after we have ſuppoſed them away, and the ideas of which are included in all our reaſonings, and all our notions of truth and morality. I therefore only hint this argument, and leave the reader to judge of it as he pleaſes. See *Review of the Principal Queſtions and Difficulties in Morals*, Chap. V.

to me, on the whole, ſcarcely more certain that events happen at all, than that they do not happen without the Providence of the Deity. As the maker and preſerver of the world, he muſt take cognizance of whatever happens, and have an abſolute dominion over it. Some determination, therefore, of his will there muſt be with reſpect to *every* event. His knowing that an event happens, and at the ſame time not interpoſing to prevent it, is a conſent that it ſhould happen; and as this *conſent* muſt be founded on ſome reaſons, it is the very ſame with exerciſing a providence over the event. This obſervation will have more weight if we add, that he foreſaw the event before it happened, and yet was not pleaſed ſo to diſpoſe things as to exclude it; or, that when he eſtabliſhed the preſent ſyſtem of nature, he knew that it would ariſe in conſequence of his eſtabliſhment, which yet he did not think fit to alter.——We ought to poſſeſs not much leſs than his omniſcience to be able to comprehend the reaſons which have guided, in every inſtance, the

determinations of his Providence. It ſhould be enough to us to know that, whatever theſe reaſons are, they muſt be worthy of infinite intelligence, or at leaſt, of a piece with that perfection of wiſdom and art which we ſee in the whole of the inanimate creation. But theſe obſervations I ſhall have occaſion to reſume in ſome of the following ſections.

SECT. II.

Of the arguments for Providence from the general laws and conſtitution of the world.

IT has been ſhewn in the preceding ſection, that the perfect character of the Deity cannot be maintained without allowing an all-directing and unerring Providence. It would have been taking much too large a compaſs to enter, on this occaſion, into an account of the evidence for the Divine perfections. 'Tis ſufficient if it appears that the doctrine of Providence reſts on the ſame foundation with them, and follows from them. There is, however, one objection here, of which it will be proper to take ſome notice. It may be ſaid, " that our only " evidence for the Divine perfections is " taken from what we obſerve of their ef- " fects in the frame of nature, and that there- " fore to infer from theſe perfections any " greater

"greater order and wiſdom in the admini-
"ſtration of nature than we can actually
"obſerve, is to ſuppoſe greater perfection in
"the Deity than can be proved, and the
"ſame with firſt determining the properties
"of the cauſe by the effect, and then de-
"termining the properties of the effect by
"the cauſe."

In anſwer to this I would obſerve, 1ſt, that it is not true that our whole evidence for the Divine perfections is taken from the frame of nature. The diſcoveries of reaſon, however they may be preceded by obſervation and experience, and take their riſe from them, tranſcend them infinitely; and in many inſtances force us to receive truths which they are incapable of ſuggeſting *.

But,

* I am under a neceſſity of referring again to the *Review of the principal Queſtions and Difficulties in Morals*, Chap. 1ſt and 10th, where I have endeavoured to prove all that is here aſſerted. The works of creation *demonſtrate* that the Creator is poſſeſſed of *power* and *intelligence*. That he poſſeſſes them *in the higheſt poſſible degree*, follows from his nature as an *uncauſed* Being. Whatever qualities ſuch

But, 2dly, ſuppoſing that our whole knowledge of the Deity muſt be derived from what we ſee of his works, it will not follow that we ought to aſcribe to him only juſt that preciſe degree of the perfections we believe him to poſſeſs, which is equal to what we can comprehend of their effects in the contrivance and order of the world. This would imply, that we ought never to infer from any *data* more than they immediately contain, and therefore would put an end

a Being has, he muſt have *neceſſarily*, and, therefore, in their ſource and in infinity. This is capable of the ſtricteſt proof, and muſt, I fancy, appear to every one who has juſt views of this ſubject. The *perfect intelligence* of the Deity being in this way diſcovered, it will follow that he is poſſeſſed of *perfect benevolence and rectitude*; for theſe are included in perfect intelligence; as, I think, is ſhewn in the treatiſe juſt referred to. And thus, on the principles maintained in that treatiſe, the complete idea of *Deity*, conſiſting of infinite *power*, *intelligence*, and *goodneſs* eſſentially united, will be eſtabliſhed; and this being eſtabliſhed, the doctrine of an unerring providence guiding all events, or of a perfect order in nature, will be likewiſe eſtabliſhed, as is ſhewn in the preceding ſection.

end to all reaſoning.—The cauſe muſt always have in himſelf, in a *greater* degree, thoſe perfections which he communicates.

It would be eaſy to ſhew that from the works of creation we have reaſon to infer a much higher degree of power, wiſdom and goodneſs in the Creator than they directly exhibit; and therefore it will be right in this caſe, firſt to argue upwards from the effect, as a foundation for proving the perfections of the cauſe, and then back again from the cauſe thus diſcovered to the effect. Thus, in natural philoſophy, by reaſoning from particular facts we gain the knowledge of the general laws which obtain in nature, and afterwards apply theſe laws to the explanation of other facts which could not otherwiſe have been accounted for. For inſtance; from the fact that gravity is the power which keeps the moon in her orbit, is inferred the general law of gravitation, by the help of which the whole order of the ſolar ſyſtem is laid open to us, and all the motions of the bodies that compoſe it explained,

plained. How abſurd would it be to object in this inſtance, than no concluſion can be drawn from any facts which will prove any greater degree of regularity in nature than theſe facts themſelves exhibit, or which can be rightly uſed to explain any other facts, about which we can make no experiments?

It is proper to add, 3dly, that we actually ſee that nature is the effect of ſuch wiſdom as ſurpaſſes our higheſt conceptions. We know this in numberleſs inſtances; and the ſame wiſdom that takes place in theſe inſtances, we are unavoidably led to apply to other inſtances where it is not ſeen, and to the whole adminiſtration of events. It will, I hope, appear hereafter that this is an obſervation of particular weight on this ſubject of Providence. In the mean time, it is neceſſary that I ſhould enter upon ſome topics of a different nature.

The deſign of this ſection is to give an account of ſuch arguments for Providence

as

as may be gathered from conſidering the general laws and conſtitution of the world.

In order to be as explicit as I can on this head, I ſhall beg leave to obſerve, firſt, that it appears undeniably that there is a plan of nature ſettled, which determines *in general* the *courſe* of events. A particular order of cauſes and effects is maintained regularly and ſteadily. Laws have been eſtabliſhed which operate invariably. Many different claſſes of creatures have been brought into exiſtence, and placed in circumſtances adapted to their different natures, and all provided for ſuitably to their wants and exigencies. The world, therefore, has not been left to fluctuate fortuitouſly. There is a care taken of it, and a direction given to its affairs.—But this does not come up to what I have here chiefly in view.—It is evident not only that there is a plan or conſtitution of nature by which beings are provided for, and a general direction given to events; but that there is an influence of the Deity conſtantly exerted to

maintain this conſtitution. —— In other words; it may be proved "that the Deity "is always *preſent* and always *active* in all "places; and that his energy is the *firſt* "mover in every motion, and the true "ſource of all the powers and laws which "take place in the material world."—— To this concluſion all true philoſophy leads us; and it is a point ſo cloſely connected with the main purpoſe of this Diſſertation, that I ſhall make it the ſubject of particular examination.

Much labour has been employed by ſome perſons to account for all the phænomena of nature by the powers of mechaniſm, or the neceſſary laws of matter and motion. But it ſeems indiſputable that this cannot be done. The *primary cauſes* of things muſt, certainly, be ſome powers or principles not mechanical. For let it be granted that any particular effect is owing to the impulſe of other matter on that in which the effect is obſerved; it may be aſked, what gives motion to this other matter. If it is anſwered,

anſwered, the impulſe of ſome *third* matter; it may be again aſked, whence this third matter derives its motion. And thus, whatever number of intermediate ſteps there may be, we muſt at laſt come to ſome matter that did not receive its motion from the impulſe of other matter; or to ſome immechanical cauſe.——This reaſoning can no way be evaded, but by either maintaining an endleſs progreſſion of motions communicated from matter to matter, without any *firſt mover*; or by ſaying, that the firſt impelling matter moved itſelf.——The former is an abſurdity too great to be embraced by any one; and there is reaſon to hope, that the eſſential inactivity of matter is at preſent ſo well underſtood, that there can be but few who will care to aſſert the latter. ——All our reaſonings about bodies and the whole of Natural philoſophy are founded on the three laws of motion, laid down by Sir Iſaac Newton at the beginning of the *Principia*. Theſe laws expreſs the plaineſt truths; but they would have neither evidence nor meaning, were not inactivity contained in our idea of matter.

I know

I know it will be ſaid, that matter, though naturally inert, may be made to be otherwiſe by Divine power. But this is the ſame with ſaying, that matter may be made not to be matter. If inactivity belongs to it at all, it muſt belong to it *as* matter, or ſolid extenſion, and therefore muſt be inſeparable from it*. The natures of things are neceſſarily what they are, independently of all power. Matter is *figured*, *moveable*, *diſcerptible*, *inactive*, and capable of communicating motion by impulſe to other matter, juſt as the four ſides of a ſquare and its diagonal are *incommenſurable*; that is, not by *will*, but by *eſſence*. Theſe are not *accidental* but *primary* qualities of matter. Beſides; matter void of inactivity, ſuppoſing it poſſible, could produce no effects. 'Tis only in conſequence of this property that it is capable of giving motion to other matter, or of anſwering any purpoſe. Were, therefore, the firſt impelling

* See the *Enquiry into the Nature of the Human Soul*, Sect. I. N° 15, 24, 26, 27.

ling matter before mentioned divested of its *inertia*, or endowed with a principle of self-motion, it would be utterly unfitted for the end assigned it. What is now asserted will perhaps be evident, and the impossibility of matter without *inertia* appear more plainly upon considering particularly what would happen on the collision of such matter with other matter of the same, or of a different kind.

We know nothing of matter, and can determine nothing about it, if it is not true that it must yield to every impulse upon it in proportion to the force impressed, and that the motion *communicated* by every impulse is always equal to that *lost* by the impelling body and cannot be either greater or less; or, in other words, that it is endowed with *resistance*, and absolutely and entirely *passive* *. But nothing like this can be

* What I mean here when expressed more accurately is, that a *change of state* is always produced in the body impelling, equal to that produced in the body

be true on the ſuppoſition of active or unreſiſting matter.——For let a maſs of ſuch matter be conceived to ſtrike another maſs of inactive matter at reſt. I aſk what would happen? Not the moving of that at reſt. For the impelling body having no reſiſtance, or no tendency to *continue* in any ſtate of motion or reſt, it can have nothing like *force*, and therefore can produce no effect. —Shall it then paſs through or penetrate the body at reſt, and go on to move as if nothing ſtood in its way?——This alſo is impoſſible, or we have no idea at all of matter as a *ſolid* ſubſtance, or as ſomething diſtinct from mere extenſion.—'Tis certain then that its motion muſt be ſtopped, but

body impelled. In *compoſition* of motion, or when one body ſtrikes another body in motion obliquely, there is always motion loſt; becauſe ſome of the force of the impelling body muſt be ſpent in merely altering the direction of the other; though even here, as well as in the *reſolution* of motion where, for the ſame reaſon, motion is always gained, the general rule holds, that the *ſum* of the motions *the ſame* way, and the *difference* of the motions *contrary* ways, are always the ſame before and after colliſion.

but without communicating the leaſt motion to the body at reſt, or having the leaſt effect upon it. That is, an effect will be produced without a cauſe: For the body at reſt not having received any alteration of its ſtate, it could not have *re-acted* or been the means of altering the ſtate of the other.—There is no way of avoiding theſe contradictions but by ſaying, what is too ridiculous to deſerve any anſwer; that the moving body had the ſagacity to exert its activity to ſtop itſelf the very inſtant it came into contact with the other.

But again; let us on the other hand, ſuppoſe a body of inactive matter, (that is, of ſuch matter as we commonly reaſon about, and is the only ſubject of the laws of mechaniſm) to move towards another body of ſelf-moving and unreſiſting matter, and to impel it in the very direction in which it tends to move itſelf. Now 'tis certain that having an *innate tendency* or *endeavour to* move in this direction, it cannot *reſiſt* motion in this direction, and that

therefore the firſt body without being reacted upon, or having its own ſtate in any manner altered by the impulſe, would carry it along with the ſame velocity with which itſelf moves. Nay, the firſt body, though ever ſo ſmall, would, in the circumſtances ſuppoſed, communicate any motion though ever ſo great to any maſs or maſſes of matter, without loſing any motion itſelf, that is, without meeting with any *obſtruction*, or acting at all on the matter moved. And thus any effect may be produced by the moſt inadequate cauſe, or rather by no cauſe at all.

Once more; let a colliſion be conceived to happen between two equal bodies both compoſed of matter without *inertia*, moving in contrary directions. As one of them cannot be conceived to penetrate the other, the reſult muſt be, that both ſhall be ſtopped, but by nothing; for both wanting that property on account of which we ſay of matter, that when once in motion it will perſevere in motion, unleſs ſomething ſtops it, or having no power of reſiſtance, neither of

of them can be any obſtruction to the motion of the other *.

But

* The *reſiſtance of matter* is an expreſſion that muſt be uſed in ſpeaking on this ſubject for want of a better; but there is ſome danger of miſunderſtanding it. The meaning of it is not that matter makes any *oppoſition* to a change of its ſtate, or exerts a force to maintain itſelf in the ſtate it is in, as ſome have every improperly expreſſed themſelves. This would imply that very activity which I have endeavoured to ſhew to be inconſiſtent with its nature; and were it true, a part of the force of every impulſe would be ſpent merely in overcoming this oppoſition without producing any other effect; and therefore the ſum of the motions the ſame way would be always greater before than after colliſion, which is impoſſible. The *largeſt* body will be moved by any the *ſlighteſt* impulſe of the *ſmalleſt*; but then it can be moved only in porportion to the force of the impulſe; and this is what is chiefly meant by the *reſiſtance* of matter. For inſtance. A body at reſt will *reſiſt* another which is moving towards it; that is, it will be an *obſtruction* to the motion of this other. The latter will be retarded by the former, and will loſe juſt as much motion as it communicates——In other words. The *reſiſtance* of matter is that in its nature which makes it require an *adequate foreign* cauſe of every change of ſtate, or from whence it

But the impoſſibility of all active qualities or tendencies in matter may be proved: in

is *wholly paſſive*, and incapable of receiving any motion from impulſe that is not in a certain fixed proportion to the *relative momentum* of the impelling body, and ſtrictly equal to the change of ſtate it ſuffers in conſequence of the impulſe. In this proportion matter is always moved *without difficulty*; but beyond this there is not only a *difficulty* but an *impoſſibility* of moving it; and whatever motion it can be ſuppoſed to receive from any impulſe that is greater than that which the impelling body loſes, it muſt derive from nothing at all.

I have ſpoken above of the *force* of matter and of its *acting*, at the ſame time that I have aſſerted it not to be *active*. An attentive and candid reader cannot think this an inconſiſtency. The activity denied to matter is a power of changing its own ſtate, not that of acting upon other matter by *impulſe*. This ſort of activity or power follows from and is neceſſarily implied in its perfect paſſiveneſs or *inertia*.

Since the firſt edition of this work I have found much the ſame obſervations with thoſe now made on the reſiſtance of matter in an Eſſay, entitled, *Remarks on the laws of motion and the inertia of matter, by Dr. Stewart, Profeſſor of Natural Philoſophy at Edinburgh*, publiſhed in the firſt Volume of the Edinburgh Phyſical Eſſays.—I have found in other inſtances a conformity

in a way ſtill more direct and deciſive.—— Let it be ſuppoſed that a body now at reſt has an innate tendency to move. This tendency muſt produce its effect, either by a *gradual acceleration* in the manner gravity acts; or by inſtantaneouſly producing that particular degree of motion which ſatisfies it, and then ceaſing.——— In the former caſe; the tendency to acceleration being the ſame with a tendency to a conſtant change of velocity, and this being a *permanent* quality in the body, no particular motion derived from it can have the leaſt *duration*, but muſt be given and deſtroyed at one and the ſame moment, and therefore nothing could be done.—In other words; ſuch a tendency is a tendency to an infinity of different velocities at once, and therefore is impoſſible.——Neither can motion be acquired in the latter way;

mity between the obſervations in that excellent Eſſay and ſome that follow, which gives me pleaſure, and confirms me in thinking, that there are few points better proved, than that which is the ſubject of this ſection from p. 27 to p. 52.

for motion ſo acquired no force could deſtroy, becauſe at the very inſtant it is *deſtroyed* it muſt be *acquired* in conſequence of the ſuppoſed tendency. No impulſe, therefore, can without a contradiction be ſuppoſed to have any effect upon the motion of ſuch a body; and though ever ſo ſmall, it would carry before it all the bodies of the world if in its way, without being itſelf retarded. And were two ſuch bodies, moving in contrary directions, to meet, ſince neither could be ſtopped, they muſt either penetrate one another, or be annihilated.

It is eaſy to ſee that the ſame way of arguing may be uſed to prove, that there can be no innate tendency in matter, when in motion, to a ſtate of reſt.—— Matter naturally preſerves the motion once impreſſed upon it, juſt as it does its figure; and were not this true, it would not be poſſible that any force ſhould give it motion, for the effect of ſuch force not being capable of remaining

ing *any* time, it would be loſt as ſoon as gained: that is, no effect would be produced.

Theſe are obſervations which I am perſuaded, no perſon can duly attend to without feeling the weight of them. Nothing, ſurely, can be more repugnant to our ideas of matter than ſelf-motion; nor is there any concluſion which there is much more reaſon to rely upon than that it is not a ſubject capable of any *ſpontaneous powers*, and therefore muſt owe every change that can happen in it to ſome *foreign* influence.

This concluſion will be further confirmed if we conſider what naturally offers itſelf in the next place, and what muſt not be omitted on this argument, that ſelf-moving matter muſt have thought and deſign. Whenever matter moves it muſt move in ſome particular direction, and with ſome preciſe degree of velocity; and there be-

ing an infinity of theſe equally poſſible, it cannot move itſelf without ſelecting one of theſe out of the reſt, or determining itſelf to one of them excluſively of all the others, and therefore not without deſign.——But this is not all. It may be plainly proved that matter cannot be the *ultimate* cauſe of the *phænomena* of nature, or the agent, which, by any powers inherent in itſelf, produces the general laws of nature, without poſſeſſing the higheſt degree of knowledge and wiſdom.——Let us, as a proper inſtance to reaſon upon here, take the particular law of gravitation. The true account, I ſay, of this law cannot be any innate propenſities of matter to motion, or its uniformly moving itſelf according to ſtated rules. For in order to obſerve theſe rules, every particle of it muſt be able to conform itſelf to all the different ſituations it can be in, and therefore muſt know the preciſe *diſtances*, *magnitudes*, and *number* of all the ſurrounding parts of matter; theſe being the circumſtances

which univerſally determine the force and direction of gravity. Thus; if a particle of matter on the ſurface of the earth tends towards the earth by its own energy, and without any foreign influence upon it, with that preciſe degree of velocity, and in that preciſe direction which the law of gravitation requires, it muſt, in order to this, know the preciſe *figure* and *bulk* of the earth, and its *ſituation* upon it, ſince the ſmalleſt variation in any one of theſe particulars will alter the velocity and direction of its motion. When placed *within* the ſurface it muſt diminiſh its own force at different diſtances from the center, in the *ſimple direct ratio* of theſe diſtances. When placed *without* the ſurface, it muſt diminiſh its own force in the *inverſe, duplicate* ratio of its diſtances from the center. When carried to the center of gravity between the moon and the earth, it muſt determine itſelf to reſt. When carried beyond this, it muſt determine its motion towards the moon, and not

the

the earth.——Is it poſſible that matter ſhould vary its own motions in a manner thus wonderful; inſomuch that all the different parts of it appear to act in perfect concert with one another for producing the order of nature, and bringing about the beſt ends*? The following argument will, I believe, ſhew that there is not leſs than the evidence of demonſtration againſt the poſſibility of this.——Nothing can *know* or *act* where it is not. The preſence and activity of every particle of matter are confined to that particular part of ſpace it fills up. Were it ever ſo intelligent or active it could *know* nothing, it could *do* nothing beyond this. How then can it be ſo acquainted with the ſtate of bodies at the greateſt diſtance from it, and no way connected with it, as to be able to act in concert with them, and to move itſelf in exact conformity to their ſituation and numbers ‡?

What

* See Dr. Stewart's Eſſay, quoted p. 36.

‡ "It is inconceivable that inanimate brute matter ſhould, without the mediation of ſomething "elſe,

What has been ſaid of gravitation might with equal evidence be proved concerning any more general cauſe, of which poſſibly gravitation may be only an effect; ſuch as Sir Iſaac Newton's *Æther*, or whatever other mediums or powers may exiſt, and be the real *primary* cauſes of the phænomena of the world. The elaſticity, for example, of ſuch an *æther* as Sir Iſaac Newton has deſcribed, ſuppoſing it to exiſt, muſt be derived, not from any powers of ſelf-motion in the matter

" elſe, which is not material, operate upon and af-
" fect other matter without mutual contact, as it
" muſt be, if gravitation be eſſential and inherent in
" it. And this is one reaſon why I deſired you
" would not aſcribe innate gravity to me. That
" gravity ſhould be innate, inherent, and eſſential
" to matter, ſo that one body may act upon another
" at a diſtance through a *vacuum*, without the
" mediation of any thing elſe, by and through which
" their action and force may be conveyed from one
" to another, is to me ſo great an abſurdity that I
" believe no man who has in philoſophical matters a
" competent faculty of thinking, can ever fall into
" it." *See the Third of the Four Letters from Sir Iſaac Newton to Dr. Bent'y, printed for Mr. Dodſley.*

matter of this *æther*, but from the conſtant agency upon it of an intelligent and omnipreſent ſpirit*.

To aſſert that matter can conform its own motions in the manner requiſite to produce

* "In our enquiries into nature" (ſays an excellent philoſopher) "we are always meeting with "powers that ſurpaſs mere mechaniſm, or the "effects of matter and motion. The laws of "nature are conſtant and regular, and for ought "we know all of them may be reſolved into one "general and extenſive power; but this power itſelf "derives its properties and efficacy not from "mechaniſm, but in a great meaſure from the "immediate influences on the firſt mover." *Mr. Macklaurin's Account of Sir Iſaac Newton's Diſcoveries*, Book IV. ch. 9. §. 12. —— "Later philoſophers "frame hypotheſes for explaining all things mecha-"nically; whereas, the main buſineſs of natural "philoſophy is to argue from phænomena without "framing hypotheſes, and to deduce cauſes from "effects till we come to the very firſt cauſe which "*certainly is not mechanical.*" *Newton's Opticks*, *Query* 28.——"Cauſæ ſimpliciſſimæ nulla dari poteſt "mechanica explicatio: ſi daretur enim, cauſa "nondum eſſet ſimpliciſſima." *Mr. Cotes's Preface to Newton's Principia.*

produce and maintain thoſe general laws of nature on which the world depends, is indeed but little better than direct atheiſm, or reſolving ultimately the whole order and contrivance of the world into matter and motion.——— Some good men, however, have been ſtrangely deceived on this ſubject, by confuſed notions of the Divine power to plant laws in matter, or to indue it with certain active principles * and tendencies, in virtue of which it ſhall of itſelf, and independently of any immediate external influence upon it, *execute* the plan at firſt laid by infinite wiſdom, and *continue* the form and order of the univerſe. But they could never have entertained any ſuch opinion, had they attended in a proper manner to that *inertia* of matter before explained, by which it is as incapable of changing its own ſtate with reſpect

* "The great author of all things (Mr. Derham "ſays) has *inſpirited* the materials of which the "world conſiſts with the *active quality* called *gravity*." *Aſtro-Theology*, Book VI. ch. 3.

reſpect to reſt and motion as its own figure; or had they conſidered that if matter, *by its own proper agency*, produces the laws, and keeps up the regularity of nature, it is a ſubject naturally capable of thoſe powers whereby it does this, and might as well have at firſt diſpoſed itſelf into the form and order of the univerſe *.

It

* 'Tis worth obſerving that the reaſoning here uſed holds with equal force againſt a notion that has been embraced and defended by ſome great men, but which is totally unworthy of them; I mean the notion of a *plaſtic nature*, or certain *vital* and *ſpiritual*, but *unintelligent* and *neceſſary* agent which the Deity is ſuppoſed to have created to carry on under himſelf his ſcheme, and to produce the various effects and phænomena of nature.———If an unintelligent agent can act with ſuch uniformity, and yet ſo variouſly, as to produce the order of the world, and govern its motions; if, for inſtance, it can frame the bodies of plants and animals, or ſo direct its own action as to impel the particles of matter towards one another, in ſuch different directions, and with ſuch different forces in different ſituations, as to be the conſtant cauſe of thoſe laws and powers which obtain in the corporeal univerſe, and on which depend its form and being; if, I ſay, this is poſſible

It has been alſo often objected "that "it is impairing the beauty of the "world

ſible, there is an end of all our reaſonings about cauſes and effects, and of all arguments for deſign and intelligence in the author of nature, taken from its regularity and beauty.——It avails nothing to ſay, that this agent acts in ſubordination to the Deity, and only in virtue of powers given it by him. For it is not ſuppoſed to be merely an inſtrument in the hands of the Deity which never acts except in conſequence of being firſt acted upon; but what it does it is ſuppoſed to do properly by a power inherent in itſelf, without wanting any *immediate* direction from the Deity; and the very reaſons that have been aſſigned for ſuppoſing ſuch an agent, are, that it is abſurd to think that the Deity ſhould be continually employed ſo much in vain, as is neceſſary to be ſuppoſed, if the general laws of the world are derived from his agency; and that it is diſhonouring him to conceive of him as acting himſelf continually on matter, and immediately concerned in framing the bodies of the meaneſt plants and inſects.———To as little purpoſe is it to ſay, that omnipotence can give ſuch a power to an unintelligent agent: for what has not wiſdom *cannot* act wiſely, and no power can make that to be, which *cannot* be. If the Deity can make a cauſe that

" world, and repreſenting it as a pro-
" duction more imperfect than any
" work

that acts without knowledge or deſign to produce regular effects; then it is in the nature of things poſſible for *ſuch* a cauſe to produce *ſuch* effects; then deſign in the cauſe is not *neceſſary* to the greateſt conceivable order and regularity in the effect, nor can we *certainly* infer the one from the other: then, in ſhort, any thing may produce any thing, and no concluſion with reſpect to the cauſe can be drawn, in any caſe, from what we ſee in the effect.——— The effects of habits have been very improperly alledged, as affording inſtances of regular action without knowledge of deſign. For, what is done by habits, is, I think, always done in conſequence of ſome volition or direction of the mind; and our not being conſcious of it is in reality no more than not remembering it, the whole effect of a habit on the executive powers conſiſting in their more eaſy and ready compliance with the dictates of the mind. But not to inſiſt on this; let it be granted that regular actions are frequently performed in conſequence of habits without thought or deſign; this, if true, muſt be owing to certain powers and laws of the animal oeconomy which muſt be accounted for in the ſame manner with other powers and laws which obtain in nature, and cannot be made an argument for ſuch a blind plaſtic force as has been contended

for,

" work of human art, to maintain that " it cannot ſubſiſt of itſelf, or that it " requires the hand of its maker to be " always at it to continue its motions " and order."

The full anſwer to this objection is, that to every machine or perpetual movement for anſwering any particular purpoſe, there always belongs ſome *firſt mover*, ſome *weight* or *ſpring*, or other power which is continually acting upon it, and from which all its motions are derived: Nor, without ſuch a power, is it poſſible to conceive of any ſuch

for, without begging the queſtion. —— See the truly great and learned Dr. *Cudworth's Intellectual Syſtem*, Book I. Chap. 3. where the opinion on which I have made theſe remarks is particularly explained and defended. See alſo an account of a controverſy which it occaſioned between Mr. Bayle and Le Clerc, in the account of the life and writings of Dr. Cudworth, prefixed to the ſecond edition of the *Intellectual Syſtem* by Dr. Birch.——Dr. Henry More and Dr. Grew have likewiſe maintained this opinion.

machine. The machine of the univerſe then, like all beſides analogous to it of which we have any idea, muſt have a *firſt mover*. Now, it has, I think, been demonſtrated, that this firſt mover cannot be matter itſelf. It follows, therefore, that this objection is ſo far from being of any force, that it leads us to the very concluſion which it is brought to overthrow.——The excellence of a machine by no means depends on its going properly *of itſelf*, for this is impoſſible; but on the ſkill with which its various parts are adjuſted to one another, and all its different effects are derived from the *conſtant action* of ſome *power*—— What would, indeed, make a machine appear imperfect and deformed is, aſſigning a ſeparate power to every diſtinct part, without allowing any place for mechaniſm. And, in like manner, what would really make the frame of nature appear imperfect and deformed is, reſolving phænomena too ſoon to the Divine agency, or ſuppoſing it the *immediate*

diate cauſe of every particular effect. But every one muſt ſee that what I have been pleading for is not this, but only, that however far mechaniſm may be carried and the chain of cauſes extend in the material univerſe, to the Divine Power exerted continually in all places, every law and every effect and motion in it muſt be *at laſt* reſolved.—This is a concluſion which the modern improvements in natural philoſophy have abundantly confirmed, and which ſome of the firſt and beſt philoſophers have received; nor can that philoſophy be otherwiſe than little and contemptible which hides the Deity from our views, which excludes him from the world, or does not terminate in the acknowledgement and adoration of him as the maker, preſerver, and ruler of all things *.

The

* "The philoſopher who overlooks the traces of "an all-governing Deity in nature, contenting him- "ſelf with the appearances of the material univerſe "only, and the mechanical laws of motion, neglects

The point on which I have been inſiſting is of ſo much importance that no apology can be neceſſary for dwelling ſo long upon it.——What has been ſaid has a tendency to give an attentive mind the deepeſt ſenſe of the dependence of the creation of the Deity? for it ſhews us that he is properly the *life* of it, the *infinite Spirit* by which it is informed and ſuſtained; that all material cauſes are no more than inſtruments in his hand, and that from him their efficacy is derived; and

" what is moſt excellent; and prefers what is " imperfect to what is ſupremely perfect, finitude to " infinity, what is narrow and weak to what is " unlimited and almighty, and what is periſhing to " what endures for ever." *Mr. Maclaurin's Account of Sir Iſaac Newton's Diſcoveries*, Book IV. Ch. 9. Sect. 1.——" Sir Iſaac Newton thought it moſt " unaccountable to exclude the Deity *only* out of the " univerſe. It appeared to him much more juſt " and reaſonable to ſuppoſe that the whole chain of " cauſes, or the ſeveral ſeries of them, ſhould center " in him as their ſource; and the whole ſyſtem " appear depending on him the only independent " cauſe." *Ibid.* Sect. 5.

and that, ſo far is he from being an idle ſpectator of what happens, that were he, for one inſtant, to ſuſpend his agency, univerſal confuſion would take place, and all nature fall to pieces.

I need not ſay how irreſiſtible the evidence is which ariſes from hence for the doctrine of Providence.——What it may be of moſt importance to recommend to notice in this place is the following obſervation.——It has been proved that the Deity pervades and actuates the whole material world, and that his unremitting energy is the cauſe to which every effect in it muſt be traced. Now, the *ſpiritual* world is, without doubt, of greater conſequence. Is his energy then wanting here? Is there not *one atom of matter* on which he does not act; and is there then *one living Being* about which he has no concern? Does not a *ſtone fall* without him; and does then a *man ſuffer* without him? Are ſuch influences as may be neceſſary to bring about a juſt

regulation of events in the moral world, leſs likely than thoſe influences which we know to be exerted continually to maintain the order of the inanimate world? ——The truth is, the inanimate world is of *no* conſequence abſtracted from its ſubſerviency to the animate and reaſonable world. The former, therefore, muſt be preſerved and governed entirely with a view to the latter *.

This leads me to a further argument on this ſubject which has, I think, conſiderable weight, and ſeems greatly to ſtrengthen the concluſion I would eſtabliſh. ———This argument has been hinted already, but it is neceſſary that it ſhould be here brought more particularly to view. It offers itſelf to us upon conſidering the wiſdom manifeſted in the ſtructure of every

* I have not mentioned here the conſtant exertion of Divine power in maintaining the ſucceſſion of vegetables, and in producing men, and other beings, becauſe particular notice of it will be taken hereafter.

every object in the inanimate creation. How fair is the form of every vegetable, and how curiouſly arranged its parts? What a profuſion of beauty and elegance ſeems to be waſted away in woods and wilderneſſes, where no eye ever obſerves them? What exquiſite mechaniſm, what nice workmanſhip and amazing art appear in every leaf and ſpire of graſs?——— Let us now aſk ourſelves; has God, in the *loweſt* of his works, been thus *laviſh* of wiſdom, beauty, and ſkill, and is he *ſparing* of theſe in the concerns of *reaſonable* beings? or does he leſs regard order, propriety, and fitneſs in the determination of their ſtates?——It is not poſſible to imagine this.——Whatever appearance the affairs of men may at preſent make to us, we may be certain that they are directed by the ſame wiſdom with that which we obſerve in the reſt of nature; that is, by a wiſdom which we know to be infinitely ſuperior to ours; by a wiſdom, which, in the meaneſt objects, is exact and incomprehenſible, and which

therefore, muſt be as much more ſo, in higher objects, as they are of greater value.———To this purpoſe in a great meaſure is the reaſoning we find in Matt. vi. 28, &c. *Why take ye thought for rayment? Conſider the lillies of the field how they grow. They toil not, neither do they ſpin; and yet, I ſay unto you, that even Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of theſe. Wherefore, if God ſo clothe the graſs of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is caſt into the oven; ſhall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Behold the fowls of the air, for they ſow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly father feedeth them. Are not ye much better than they?*

There is not indeed any thing which has a much greater tendency to give relief to a mind earneſtly wiſhing to be ſatisfied of a wiſe ſuperintendency of all that befalls it, than to contemplate the curious organization of any flower, or herb

herb of the field, and the attention beſtowed on even its outward figure; and then to conſider whether it is probable, that the Being who ſo wonderfully wrought *ſuch* a ſubſtance, can neglect any *intelligent* creature, or be inattentive to any circumſtance of his exiſtence; whether he who has with perfect exactneſs adjuſted the parts of dead matter to one another in the moſt *trifling plant*, muſt not be proportionably exact in what is of infinitely greater moment, the adjuſtment of pleaſure and pain to a *human ſoul*, —— Or, let ſuch a perſon fix his thoughts on the ſtructure of his body, and conſider, whether it is credible that he who has ſo *fearfully* made this, and diſplayed ſuch unſpeakable wiſdom in adjuſting and regulating every particle of matter that compoſes it; has not diſplayed proportionable wiſdom in the ſtructure of his mind, or is not proportionably careful in adapting events to its caſe, and in regulating whatever it feels, —— To ſay no more. If unerring

unerring wiſdom ſhews itſelf in the direction and government of *corporeal* nature, and all its parts are ordered in number, weight, and meaſure, ſo that the more we know of it, the more we are forced to admire it; if its meaneſt works are finiſhed with complete accuracy, and the whole ſyſtem appears harmonious and grand in the higheſt poſſible degree; what harmony, what wiſdom and goodneſs may we well reckon upon in the government of the intellectual world? What care and accuracy in diſpoſing the lots of the individuals of it? How grand muſt be its plan, and how perfect its order?

SECT. III.

Of the manner in which Providence is adminiſtered.

WHAT has been hitherto ſaid contains a brief view of the principal arguments for the doctrine of a righteous and all wiſe Providence. My deſign in this ſection is to offer a few obſervations relating to the mode of adminiſtring it.

I have frequently in the preceding ſections ſpoken on the ſuppoſition, that a perfect direction of events is brought about by the Divine influence, immediately and conſtantly exerted every where for that purpoſe. It muſt however be remembered that this is a point about which all are not agreed. Many wiſe

and good men are ſtrongly prejudiced againſt the ſuppoſition, that there have been any interpoſitions of Divine Power ſince the creation in directing affairs, as implying an impotence, unſkilfulneſs, and operoſeneſs unworthy of infinite wiſdom. They, therefore, chuſe to conceive of the laws and order of the material world, as having been at firſt adjuſted in exact correſpondence to what ſhould happen in the moral world, and the whole ſcheme including all events as originally deſigned and laid in the beſt manner, and now continually going on to open and unfold itſelf agreeably to the Divine idea, without any occaſion for any interpoſitions.———As far as ſuch maintain the ſame perfect direction of affairs in conſequence of an *original* eſtabliſhment, as is commonly ſuppoſed to be brought about by *conſtant* influences, they maintain all that we have reaſon to be anxious about on the preſent ſubject. And this, indeed, I ſhould imagine, it muſt be impoſſible for any one who has

juſt notions of the Divine perfections to avoid maintaining, let him think on this ſubject in other reſpects as he pleaſes. For thus we may argue.——When the Deity at firſt fixed the preſent plan of nature, and gave Beings their different powers and affections, he either had a perfect foreſight of the whole train of events that would ariſe in conſequence of his eſtabliſhment, or he had not.—— If he had this fore-knowledge, the events fore-known were either all of them ſuch as he ſaw it would be propereſt to leave as fore-known, or they were not. If the affirmative is aſſerted; it is all I plead for. Every event in this caſe will be juſt ſuch as perfect rectitude is pleaſed either to *make* it, or to *ſuffer* it to be.—— But, on the contrary, if amongſt the fore-known events there were any which it was on any account right or proper to exclude; on this ſuppoſition, a good theiſt, who rejects all *occaſional interpoſitions*, muſt of neceſſity ſay, that the original plan would have been ſo altered as to exclude

exclude theſe events, and to produce a complete coincidence of all that ſhould happen with the counſels and deſigns of infinite wiſdom and goodneſs. This cannot be avoided while the exiſtence of infinite wiſdom and goodneſs in nature is believed; and thus the doctrine of Providence in its higheſt ſenſe will ſtill be aſſerted.

But if an exact fore-knowledge of all actions and events, and ſuch a perfect original eſtabliſhment in conſequence of it, as I have mentioned, are thought by any to be impoſſible; and if, for this reaſon, no more is ſuppoſed than that powers were given to beings, and general laws ſettled, and then events ſuffered to ariſe as they would, without any particular care or ſuperintendency exerciſed over them; in this caſe, the doctrine of Providence will be intirely rejected: And if ſuch ſentiments are true, the univerſe is a chaos; the character of the parent of it is imperfect; all truſt in him,

him, and ſupplications to him are abſurd, and no part of practical religion has any good foundation.——But after what has been before ſaid, I hope I may be allowed to take it for granted, that theſe ſentiments are not true, and that there is indeed a perfect direction of all events. ——The point I am now conſidering is, in what manner this is accompliſhed; and it has probably been already ſeen in ſome meaſure why I chuſe to conceive of it as produced by conſtant influences, rather than ſuch an original eſtabliſhment as I have mentioned.——It will appear to ſome, that an original eſtabliſhment, anſwering this purpoſe, implies univerſal fataliſm, and, that in events happening amongſt reaſonable agents, there muſt be infinite variations and uncertainties not poſſible to be regulated by it. But be this as it will; it muſt, I think, be difficult for an attentive perſon to perſuade himſelf, that the other method of adminiſtring Providence is not the moſt capable of bringing about

a perfect regulation of events. And if this ſhould be true; or, if any purpoſes of wiſdom and goodneſs may be anſwered by conſtant influences, which could not at all, or not ſo well, have been anſwered in any other way, we may be ſatisfied that there really are ſuch influences: And to aſſert the contrary from a prejudice againſt them as not regular, or not becoming the Deity, ſeems in the higheſt degree unreaſonable. Can it be irregular to produce the higheſt regularity, or unbecoming the Deity to govern the univerſe and its affairs in ſuch a manner as is moſt agreeable to the ends for which he created it? Will he ſacrifice the higheſt order to the loweſt; or ſuffer events to ariſe at random in the world, rather than at any time put forth his hand to direct them? Muſt he have been only looking on ever ſince the creation; and is *this* what is moſt becoming him?

Some, probably, are led into miſtakes on this ſubject, by thinking of the manner

ner in which it is moſt becoming the Deity to act, too ſtrictly in conformity to that in which men are obliged to act. They have but little power, and therefore are obliged to be as frugal of it as poſſible. But there is nothing difficult to the Deity, and conſequently there can be nothing to influence him to chuſe one way of acting rather than another, beſides, its being more agreeable to rectitude, and more conducive to his end. And this likewiſe is, in reality, the moſt beautiful way of acting. Beauty conſiſts chiefly in the proper and effectual adaptation of means to ends. For this reaſon, thoſe means are the moſt beautiful, and thoſe ſyſtems the beſt, which beſt anſwer their end.——In mere natural order, abſtracted from all uſe, there is nothing valuable; and the very reaſon why the Deity has choſen to eſtabliſh a courſe of nature is, the neceſſity of it as a means to produce happineſs, and to give his reaſonable creatures room for a proper

exertion of their faculties, and for the practice of virtue.

Theſe obſervations ſeem to me of importance on the preſent ſubject; but, without having recourſe to them, it muſt ſurely be very evident, that influences, conſiſtent with the free agency of beings and uniformly exerted to exclude every event fit to be excluded, and to produce perfect order in the adminiſtration of the world, are ſo far from unbecoming the almighty and omnipreſent parent, that we can conceive of nothing more worthy of him, or that can make his character appear more amiable. Nor is there any more reaſon to be prejudiced againſt them, than againſt the influence which the conſtitution of the world allows to every agent over events, in proportion to his power and knowledge. There is no perſon who does not influence in various ways what paſſes within the circle of his friends and acquaintance, and it has never yet been thought that the liberty of mankind,

or their ſcope for action is affected by it. Inviſible and ſuperior Beings may alſo be frequently employed in directing occurrences among mankind. Now, the influence of Divine Providence is a fact of the ſame kind with theſe, and ſeems not to be on any account more liable to objections. Shall we acknowledge the influence of *every* agent on events, and deny that of the *Supreme?* Was it indeed fit that by one original act he ſhould exclude himſelf from all further concern with his works; or can it be poſſible to imagine that the Being who is the fountain of all energy, and whoſe nature is perfect activity and power, ſhould be the *only* inactive Being in the univerſe? Is it not, on the contrary, much more rational to believe, that his influence over events extends as much further than that of any other Being, and is as much more conſtant, as the relation in which he ſtands to beings is nearer, and his power and wiſdom greater?

In ſhort; the notion of an *almighty* Being, *perfectly benevolent*, obſerving the affairs of his own offspring, and yet never exerting any influence to give them that direction which he moſt approves, muſt, I ſhould think, appear too inconſiſtent and abſurd not to ſhock every attentive and unprejudiced perſon.———With reſpect, however, to the analogy I have juſt mentioned between Divine Providence and the influence of created agents, it is neceſſary to obſerve, that it ſhould be conſidered with ſome caution. We ſhall here be in great danger of deceiving ourſelves, if we judge of what the Deity ſhould do, by what we ought to do. It is our duty to exclude, as far as we can, all vice and ſufferings from the world; and becauſe this is not done by the Deity, who has all hearts in his hands, and an unlimited power over events, ſome have queſtioned whether he at all directs events, or concerns himſelf about us. But happy is it for the world that it is

not

not governed in the manner in which human wiſdom would govern it. From what is incumbent on us in our circumſtances, we cannot by any means infer what, in this inſtance, it is proper for the Deity to do as ſupreme governor*. We are too much unacquainted with his counſels and plan to be able to determine this. Undoubted fact proves that the

 original

* A teacher of religion who had the power by his inſtructions and perſuaſions to engage men effectually to virtue would be inexcuſable as far as he neglected this. But it ſeems that Jeſus Chriſt could have ſo ſpoken to men, and ſo influenced their hearts, as to render his miniſtry more ſucceſsful than it was. He tells us, that there were places where, if he had done the ſame works that he did in Judea, the inhabitants would have repented in ſackcloth and aſhes. Theſe places therefore muſt have been denied the means which it was known would have brought them to happineſs.—There are degrees of advantages which, if men reſiſt or miſimprove, the Deity does not ſee fit to grant them more, whatever he may know would be the conſequence. But by what reaſons or rules particularly his providence is guided in this inſtance we cannot ſay.

original conſtitution was ſo eſtabliſhed by him as to admit of vice and ſufferings in the preſent ſtate, and that therefore it cannot be a part of his ſcheme of Providence entirely to exclude them. We ſee that there are numberleſs perſons to whom he does not give all the advantages for virtue and happineſs which they might enjoy, and which, in all probability, would be effectual. It is ſufficient to know that he gives more than enough to all, and does every thing that it is wiſeſt and beſt for him to do, in order to bring about univerſal and infinite happineſs.—But this ſubject will be more particularly conſidered hereafter, when I come to examine the objections againſt providence, taken from the evil, natural and moral, in the world.

Many of thoſe who think, that there are no conſtant influences of the Deity in directing events, are ready to acknowledge, and every one who believes that Chriſtianity was proved by miracles and

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came from God, muſt acknowledge, that there are particular emergencies in which he does interpoſe in the affairs of the world. Now, this conceſſion is ſufficient to eſtabliſh what I am pleading for. For let it but be allowed that the Deity has ever once interpoſed ſince the original eſtabliſhment of things, and there will remain no tolerable reaſon for imagining, that he does not interpoſe continually, as far as there is any occaſion.

It will, I think, be frivolous to aſſert, that this account of Providence make it a continual ſeries of *miracles*. If all exertions of Divine Power are to be conſidered as *miraculous*, this will indeed be true; nor will there be the leaſt reaſon why it ſhould not be admitted.——That influence of ſuperior power which is implied in a miracle may, for ought we know, be exerted on numberleſs occaſions; and what diſtinguiſhes it from common events may be only that, in the caſe of a miracle, the influence of ſuperior

power is rendered obvious and ſenſible, by the extraordinary circumſtances attending a particular fact. Thus; the removal of a diſeaſe in the common courſe of things no perſon can look upon as miraculous, whatever he may believe concerning the conſtant agency of the Deity in the creation. But if a diſeaſe is removed inſtantaneouſly at the command of a man, or in any other manner which cannot be accounted for by the ordinary powers of nature; in this caſe, the interpoſition of ſuperior power becomes *viſible*, and a proper miracle happens.

But what effectually removes every objection of this kind, and almoſt decides the queſtion I am conſidering, is a point which has been already at large inſiſted upon; namely, "That the cauſe from "which the general laws * that govern "the

* It is to be wiſhed, that all who think on the ſubject of this ſection would conſider, what they mean by the word *Laws*. It is very ambiguous and indeter-

" the material world are derived, is the " immediate power of the Deity exerted " every where." It has, I hope, been ſhewn in the laſt ſection, that we have clear and ſtrong evidence for this.——To what was there ſaid, I will beg leave to add, on the preſent occaſion, that it is from this cauſe alſo, in particular, muſt be derived that conſtant ſucceſſion of vegetables and animals which is kept up in the world. There is not one fact in nature which can be completely accounted for by the mere powers of mechaniſm. Moſt certainly then this fact cannot be thus accounted for. It is utterly inconceivable,

indeterminate in its ſignification, and has been often ſtrangely miſapplied and abuſed. The preſent queſtion furniſhes us with a ſtrong proof of this. The general laws of nature ſignify nothing but particular *phænomena* which are obſerved in nature, or particular modes of the operation of ſome cauſe. When, therefore, the regulation of events, the continuance of the order of the world, or the formation of vegetables and animals is aſcribed to *Laws* eſtabliſhed at the creation, either the word *Laws* has no ſenſe at all, like the word *Nature* when uſed in the ſame manner, or it muſt ſignify the regular and conſtant agency of the Creator.

ceivable, that works of ſuch ſtupendous art as the bodies of vegetables and animals, myriads of which are continually formed about us, ſhould be derived from laws planted at the creation in dead matter, which have ever ſince executed themſelves. Thoſe who ſay this, ſay they know not what. They make unmeaning words ſtand for cauſes, and attribute to matter infinitely more than it is capable of. Every new vegetable or animal, therefore, I conſider as a new production of Divine Power, acting conſtantly and regularly according to an order or ſcheme at firſt fixed by his wiſdom. But there is particular reaſon to think thus with reſpect to the conſcious and living principles of animals. It is juſt as poſſible that theſe ſhould ariſe into exiſtence, in conſequence of laws eſtabliſhed at the creation without any *immediate* exertion of Divine Power, as it is that they ſhould ariſe into exiſtence of themſelves without any cauſe at all *.——On this account, the

* I am ſenſible that there is room here for recurring to the notion of an original ſimultaneous production

the *preſervation* of all things appears to be indeed but very little different from a *con-*

production of all things; and that ſome will not heſitate to aſſert, particularly, concerning the living principles in men and brutes, that they have exiſted from the firſt formation of this earth, and have ever ſince either lain dormant till united to bodies, or been tranſmigrating from one animal to another. I will not loſe time in pointing out the abſurdity and extravagance of this notion. How poor are the prejudices which lead perſons to ſeek ſuch expedients for maintaining the inactivity of the Deity! What is it that renders it ſo neceſſary to confine the exertion of creative power to the firſt formation of a ſyſtem, rather than to conſider it as going on to exert itſelf, according to a fixed order, during the continuance of a ſyſtem?—Let this however be allowed. Still, ſince ſuch an original ſimultaneous creation as I have mentioned muſt be ſuppoſed for every particular ſyſtem; and ſince, moſt probably, there are new ſyſtems continually brought into being in the boundleſs univerſe; it will, even in this way, be neceſſary to admit the conſtant exertion of Divine power; nor is it poſſible to avoid this concluſion, without extending the notion now mentioned to the whole of nature, and aſſerting that there never has been more than one act of Divine Power, and that all the ſucceſſions of Beings and worlds ſince the commencement of created exiſtence, with all their different

a *continual creation*; for was creative power to ceaſe operating, the conſequence would be, that no more new beings would make their appearance in the world, and that this earth would ſoon become a wild and horrid deſart.

The concluſion ariſing from theſe obſervations is very obvious. Divine Power, we ſee, did not ceaſe operating at the creation. It appears, on the contrary, that there is a conſtant exertion of it through all nature. Can there be any reaſon for denying that by it Providence is adminiſtered? Though employed continually in the preſervation of the general laws of the material world, and the production of animate and inanimate Beings, muſt it be ſuppoſed to have nothing

different laws, have taken place of themſelves, and will for ever continue to do ſo, in virtue of that one act, without requiring any immediate direction from the Creator, or any interpoſition of his power. If there is any perſon who is inclined to adopt this opinion, I have nothing to ſay to him.

thing to do with the affairs of moral agents?

I cannot think of more than one difficulty that can here offer itſelf to any perſon's thoughts. It is poſſible, that ſome who admit thoſe general influences of Divine Power by which the world is preſerved, may yet imagine that there is an incredibility in that kind of influence which the interpoſitions of Providence imply, becauſe, being accommodated to particular caſes and occaſions, it muſt be a particular and occaſional influence introduced out of courſe, and not reducible to any ſtated and uniform mode of operation. It cannot perhaps be neceſſary to take much notice of this objection. ——Since *general* influences are only a number of *particular* ones, the diſtinction upon which it is founded cannot be of much weight. And, ſuppoſing it of weight, it muſt be in a great meaſure invalidated by ſome of the facts I have mentioned; for among theſe are

inſtances, not only of general and ſtated exertions of Divine Power in the world, but of ſuch as muſt be meant by particular and occaſional ones.——However, were it at all neceſſary, it might very well be granted, without any prejudice to the preſent argument, that the Deity always acts by *general* influence, and in a ſtated courſe. It is eaſy to conceive, that the agency by which a particular providence is carried on, may be an agency by laws operating, in given circumſtances, invariably and regularly; for no one can ſay, what laws and regulations may be eſtabliſhed in the univerſe, by which events may be ſecretly directed. Dr. *Butler* * obſerves, that ſo particular an interpoſal

* "Thus, that miraculous powers ſhould be "exerted at ſuch times, upon ſuch occaſions, in "ſuch degrees and manners, and with regard to "ſuch perſons rather than others; that the affairs "of the world, being permitted to go on in their "natural courſe ſo far, ſhould, juſt at ſuch a point, "have a new direction given them by miraculous "interpoſitions; that theſe interpoſitions ſhould be "exactly

interpoſal of the Deity as that in the Chriſtian revelation, might have been by general laws. It is at leaſt certain, that there is one law to which the whole of divine influence in nature, of whatever kind it is, may be reduced. I mean the ſupreme law of *rectitude*. When viewed in their reference to this, all the diverſities of operation by which the adminiſtration of the world may be conducted, agree, and appear to be only different effects of one and the ſame principle acting variouſly, according to the different circumſtances and characters of moral agents.———If any perſon ſhould ſtill want ſatisfaction about the preſent point, let

"exactly in ſuch degrees and reſpects only; all this "may have been by general laws: Unknown in- "deed to us: But no more unknown than the laws "from whence it is that ſome die as ſoon as they "are born, and others live to extreme old age; "that one man is ſo ſuperior to another in under- "ſtanding; with innumerable more things, which "we cannot reduce to any laws or rules at all, tho' "it is taken for granted they are as much reduceable "to general ones, as gravitation." *Analogy*, Part II. Chap. 4.

let him recollect an obſervation which has been made at the beginning of this ſection. Let him conſider that there is no more reaſon for being prejudiced againſt the influence of *inviſible* agents, and eſpecially the ſupreme, over events, while a courſe of nature is going on, than there is for being prejudiced, on the ſame account, againſt the influence which *viſible* agents have over the affairs of their own ſpecies, and thoſe of the Beings below them. The latter we know to be, not only conſiſtent with the courſe of nature, but a part of it; and the other may be equally ſo. This is ſo true that, agreeably to Dr. Butler's obſervation, even the interpoſition of ſuperior power implied in a miracle, however unuſual or extraordinary, may be entirely natural: That is; the conſtitution of the world may be ſuch as allows of it in certain caſes.——I know it is common to think, that miracles imply a *ſuſpenſion* or *violation* of the laws of nature. But no opinion can be more groundleſs. Were we

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to ſee the motion of water downwards ceaſe at once at the word of a man, or a river parted in its courſe, as *Jordan* was, we ſhould ſee a miracle. But we could not ſay that the law of gravitation was ſuſpended; for the water might have gravitated as uſual, and the true cauſe of the event be, the exertion of an adequate ſuperior power to controul the effects of gravitation, in which its ſuſpenſion is no more implied than in a man's preventing a heavy body from falling, by applying his hand to it. Nor could we in this inſtance ſay, that the event was not agreeable to the conſtitution of the univerſe; for in order to this we ſhould be able to diſcover what the conſtitution of the univerſe is, taking in the viſible and inviſible world, and that it excludes *all* interpoſitions of *ſuperior* power in human affairs.——Every one will eaſily ſee how theſe obſervations are to be applied to the purpoſe for which they are mentioned.———Diſmiſſing them, therefore, I ſhall beg leave to introduce here one fur-

ther obſervation which ſeems worth notice.

It ought to be conſidered that events happen in the world in ſuch a manner, as plainly render it not unlikely, that there may be ſome ſuperior influence concerned in directing them. We are far from having a perfect knowledge of all the cauſes from whence events ariſe, and therefore cannot ſay how far the Divine hand may be among thoſe cauſes. The uncertainty which attends all human ſchemes is continually obſerved and felt, and has given riſe to the common notions of *Fortune*, by which many of the antient philoſophers ſeem to have meant the ſame with *Providence*. The beſt laid ſchemes often fail of ſucceſs ſtrangely, and ſome of the moſt important changes are often derived from incidents in themſelves the moſt trifling, ſo that, indeed, it is not poſſible for us to imagine what would follow from an alteration of any one circumſtance in the general ſeries

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of events. What room then is there for the influence of inviſible agency? What a command over events would a ſuperior Being have, by only a ſecret direction of what appears to us moſt accidental and trifling?

Such are the moſt material obſervations which have occurred to me, on the manner in which Providence is adminiſtered. ——— The great enquiry on this ſubject is, how far it is reaſonable to admit the conſtant exertion of Divine influence for this purpoſe. In anſwer to this enquiry, I have endeavoured to repreſent the folly of thoſe prejudices which diſpoſe men to exclude from the world the influence of the Deity, and to conſider him as being what no other agent is; only a mere ſpectator of the laws and order of the world. But more than this has been done. It has, I think, been demonſtrated that the laws and order of the world are nothing but his uniform agency; and that the notion of a ſelf-ſubſiſting

world, or of a ſcheme eſtabliſhed at the creation which has been ever ſince executing itſelf without depending on the Creator, implies an abſolute impoſſibility. ——There is, therefore, a neceſſity of acknowledging the conſtant exertion of Divine influence in nature. This leads us almoſt unavoidably to conceive of Providence as adminiſtered by it. And, in anſwer to a difficulty which might poſſibly remain with ſome, it has been obſerved, that it is neither neceſſary to conſider the influence of Providence as an adventitious influence out of the courſe of nature, nor if it was, could any reaſon be drawn from hence for rejecting it.

The queſtion I have been diſcuſſing is, I think, the only queſtion on the mode of the adminiſtration of Providence, about which there can be much diſpute. It is neceſſary this ſhould be obſerved, becauſe ſome probably will be inclined

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to think, that there is another queſtion of which notice ſhould have been taken; namely, the queſtion how far Providence is carried on by the inſtrumentality of ſubordinate agents. But it will eaſily appear, that the diſcuſſion of this queſtion cannot lead us into any ſentiments on the points I have been conſidering, different from thoſe already explained. 'Tis with me out of doubt, that there is an inſtrumentality of ſubordinate agents in carrying on the deſigns of Providence, and it may not perhaps be poſſible to conceive how far it reaches; but then, I conſider theſe agents as acting in every inſtance under the ſuperintendency of the Deity, which reduces their inſtrumentality into a perfect coincidence with that mode of adminiſtring Providence, for which I have pleaded.——If any one will deny this, and aſſert that there is no other direction of affairs than is produced by created Beings, uninfluenced by the Deity, and acting without com-

miſſion from him; in this caſe, there will plainly be no other Providence than that of theſe Beings; and all things will be left to the effects of an original eſtabliſhment, without any ſubſequent care or government. Several remarks have been already made on this opinion, and there will be occaſion to ſay ſomewhat more about it in the next ſection. I am in hopes, however, that but little need be ſaid to convince moſt conſiderate perſons, that the moral world is not thus left to itſelf, or that the ſeveral orders of reaſonable Beings in it are not delivered up in ſuch a manner to their influence on one another, as that there is no *ſupreme direction* from the Deity. Were there no ſuch deciſive arguments to be urged as ſome that have been propoſed, we might well reckon, with confidence that the Being who is moſt nearly *related* and moſt intimately *preſent* to the world, is alſo the Being who has the moſt conſtant and active concern with it.

But

But not to repeat what has been before ſaid, I ſhall now proceed to ſome further points, which it will be proper to conſider on the ſubject of Providence.

SECT. IV.

Of the Objections againſt Providence.

A Good deal has been ſaid in anſwer to ſeveral of the objections which have been made againſt the doctrine of Providence. But there are ſome important ones of which no notice has been taken, and my deſign in this ſection is to offer a few obſervations upon them.

It would preclude much that has been objected on this ſubject to remember, that the directions of Providence are, as it is certainly beſt they ſhould be, concealed and inviſible; and that, therefore, we cannot in particular caſes determine in what manner its influence has been exerted, or what its intentions are. My meaning here will be beſt explained by con-

conſidering a few inſtances.——— A fleet, ſuppoſe, has beat an enemy's fleet in conſequence of a ſudden turn of the wind in its favour.———Here would be an event which, we might aſſuredly believe, did not happen without the concern and direction of the Deity, and which might reaſonably be aſcribed to him as the firſt cauſe and ſupreme diſpoſer of all things. But it would be preſumptuous to ſay, that it proved his approbation of the victors and their cauſe, or that the ſudden turn of the wind was produced by his *immediate* hand.——— Again; an earthquake, let us ſuppoſe, has laid in ruins a city or a kingdom. That perſon would, in my opinion, be inexcuſable, who ſhould, in this caſe, terminate his views in the natural cauſes which produced the earthquake. The eſtabliſhing theſe cauſes at firſt in the frame of nature, and conducting things ſince in ſuch a manner as that it ſhould happen juſt *when* and *where* it did, ought in all reaſon to be aſcribed to the Divine

good

good pleaſure. And were not this the caſe, or were it true that it never was any object of Divine foreſight and counſel, but derived entirely from blind chance or fate, all religious views of it would be irrational and abſurd. The particular intentions, however, of Providence in ſuch a calamity, or the reaſons by which its diſpoſals with reſpect to it have been guided, we are not capable of diſcovering; and many perſons have been much too free in their judgments on ſuch occaſions, and, in conſequence of this, have done much towards bringing this doctrine into diſcredit.——We may perceive indeed ſome general ends which are anſwered by all events of this kind, ſuch as to alarm and awaken men, and bring them to a ſenſe of virtue and piety: But we cannot go much further; or ſay, for example, that the calamity was deſigned as a judgment on the ſufferers, and indicated them to be worſe than other men.

Once

Once more. A good man, let us ſuppoſe, with ſeriouſneſs and ſimplicity, makes it the conſtant ſubject of his prayers to the Deity that he would ſhew him what is true and right, deliver his mind from the influence of unreaſonable prejudices, and direct his thoughts and enquiries. Such a perſon may, I think, be aſſured in general, that his prayers are graciouſly regarded, and that he is, in ſome way or other, the better for them. And he may alſo even believe that his ſentiments, in conſequence of them, are nearer to truth than they would otherwiſe have been. But wherein, particularly, they are ſo; or how far, in conſequence of his prayers, he has, on any one point, been guarded from error, it is not poſſible for him to know. As the Deity has thought fit to make us ſhort-ſighted and fallible, we muſt be ignorant to what degree he may ſuffer us to miſtake. Our chief ſecurity and comfort on this head are, that, with honeſt hearts, we cannot miſtake dangerouſly, or fall into any errors

that ſhall be imputed to us as crimes, and leſſen the Divine favour to us.

What has been now ſaid concerning the influences of Divine Providence is very neceſſary to be attended to, in order to prevent the danger of ſuperſtition and enthuſiaſm.——That there is a wiſe Providence extending to all events, we have, it has been ſhewn, ſufficient evidence to prove: And that its influence is not diſcernable by us, or diſtinguiſhable, in its exertions, from the common operations of natural cauſes, and the courſe of our own thoughts, is no more any reaſon for denying its reality, than it is for denying the reality of our ſouls, or of the ubiquity of the Divine eſſence, that they are not the immediate objects of ſenſible obſervation. ——— In ſome inſtances indeed, the interpoſitions of the Deity have been open and ſenſible, but ſuch interpoſitions are very extraordinary, and to expect them in any common caſes would be madneſs. The deluſions of

enthuſiaſm take their riſe from hence, and conſiſt chiefly in aſcribing particular feelings, without reaſon, to ſupernatural ſuggeſtion; or in imagining that the directions of God's Providence, and his influence on the ſoul, are capable of being particularly obſerved.

'Tis proper that it ſhould be further obſerved here, with reſpect to the doctrine of Providence, that it ought never to be explained in ſuch a manner as to deſtroy the value of the agency of created beings. This would be the caſe were ſuch a dependence of events on the Deity maintained, as would imply that they are not all dependent on the wills of inferior Beings. No one, I hope, who has attended to the account I have given of Providence, can think that any ſuch conſequence ariſes from it. I have ſhewn, particularly, how conſiſtent this doctrine is with the liberty of mankind; and what has been ſaid to this purpoſe, together with the obſervations that have been

been made on the manner of adminiſtering Providence, is ſufficient to remove any objections that can be taken from the neceſſity of allowing Beings, when created, ſcope for action, and leaving events, in ſome meaſure, to be determined by their choice. This, undoubtedly, is neceſſary. Were there no ſcope for action given Beings, or had they no power over what comes to paſs, there could be no ſuch thing as a moral government in nature, there would be no room for *real* beneficence and the happineſs connected with it, and the whole rational univerſe would be a ſyſtem of conſcious machinery, void of value and dignity. But then, ſurely, this does not oblige us to maintain that the Deity exerciſes no Providence over the Affairs of rational Beings. The power which they have over events, with all its reſtrictions, was given by him; and all the particular exertions of it are under his direction. If any of them become depraved, and bring calamities upon themſelves

themſelves or others, we muſt ſay, that ſo the Deity ſuffers things to happen. Thoſe circumſtances in the plan of nature and ſtates of Beings which gave occaſion to, or admitted of, ſuch evils, we muſt aſcribe to his will; and all that happens in conſequence of them we ought to conſider as ſuperintended by him in the beſt manner. Nothing would be more unreaſonable than to imagine, that there is any inconſiſtency between a *limited* and *derived dependence* of events on created agents, and a *ſupreme dependence* of all events on that firſt cauſe, *of whom, and through whom, are all things.*

——— My happineſs, let me ſuppoſe, depends entirely, in a particular inſtance, on the determination of one of my fellow-creatures. It will in this caſe be ſtrictly true, that it is the Deity puts me into his hands. If, contrary to reaſon and the Divine law, he abuſes his power, it will be my duty to acquieſce chearfully, from a conviction of the right which the Deity has to make my happineſs depend

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on whatever conditions he pleaſes, and of the unerring reaſon by which all his diſpenſations are guided. Not to be an abſolute ſufferer by exiſtence, if innocent, is the chief unalienable right I have. Within this limit the Deity may, in any degree he ſees beſt, and that is conſiſtent with the rules of diſtributive juſtice, make my ſtate precarious and dependent. I can never ſuffer beyond what is fit; and I may, from his goodneſs, expect all ſuch remedies for the ſufferings which may be brought upon me as are, on the whole, proper to be provided. Rectitude, under the government of a being of perfect rectitude, I may be ſure, ſhall take place invariably, univerſally and for ever; and this is all I ought to wiſh for.——In a word; the Divine ſcheme is, plainly, that events ſhall, to a certain degree, be what created agents make them. His will, in numberleſs caſes, appears to be, that one Being ſhall or ſhall not receive particular benefits, or ſuffer particular evils, as his fellow Beings ſhall

pleaſe

pleaſe to determine. But then, this happens no farther than he knows to be beſt, and in no inſtances but ſuch as he appoints. Every determination of every Being which would produce any degree of *wrong* ſuffering, or any event not conſiſtent with a perfect order of adminiſtration, he will undoubtedly either prevent, or over-rule in its conſequences. He is preſent in all minds; and that whole concatenation of events and cauſes, in conſequence of which any agent finds himſelf at any time in any circumſtances, ſhould be conſidered as derived from him, and as having been, in every part of it, the object of his ſuperintending care. It would, as I before obſerved, be denying the doctrine of Providence entirely, and making the univerſe in a manner forlorn and fatherleſs, to ſuppoſe, that all that the Deity does is to endow Beings with powers and affections, and then to turn them out into a wide theatre, there to ſcuffle as they can, and do what they pleaſe, without

taking any care of them, or preſiding over their affairs. We cannot be more ſure of the moral perfections of the Deity than we are that this is falſe. Whatever evils there are in the world, they can be only ſuch as he is pleaſed to admit into it. When he willed the exiſtence of the preſent univerſe, he willed it as including every event which he foreſaw would ariſe in it. All abuſe of liberty and reaſon he does indeed diſapprove and forbid, and will adequately puniſh. It is of eſſential malignity, and as far as it enters tends to lay waſte his works. But it can enter no further than he ſees fit to ſuffer it. He had the beſt reaſons, for eſtabliſhing at firſt thoſe ſtates and connexions of Beings, from whence he knew it would ſpring. He can reſtrain and direct it as he pleaſes, and even turn it into an occaſion of good. If other ſyſtems in which it does not take place contain more happineſs, and are equally poſſible and proper, they might, when this was produced, have been previouſly exiſtent

the greateſt variety any one can imagine, and the addition of this might have been a further proper exertion of infinite goodneſs. It would be impoſſible for the Deity ever to act, if it is a juſt reaſon againſt the production of any given ſyſtem, that there are others poſſible including greater happineſs.

But theſe are obſervations which I ſhall have occaſion to inſiſt on, and to explain particularly hereafter, and which lead me to what I chiefly intended in this ſection; namely, to conſider the objections againſt Providence taken from the irregularities and evils natural and moral, which we ſee in the world. Theſe are the greateſt of all the difficulties that occur to us in thinking of this ſubject. My deſign however is not to enter into a detail of all that may be offered to remove them, but only to ſuggeſt a few ſentiments with this view, which ſeem to me of peculiar importance, and ſome of which, per-

haps, have not been enough inſiſted on by others.

The moſt common anſwer to all the difficulties ariſing from the ſeeming irregularities and diſorders in the ſyſtem of nature, is taken from our ignorance and narrow views, compared with the extent of the ſcheme of Providence.—— This anſwer is ſolid and important, but it requires to be ſtated with ſome care, in order to appear in its juſt and full force. It may be ſaid in oppoſition to it, "that we can have no more reaſon to "conclude, on account of unknown re- "lations and connexions, that the *ſeem-* "*ing* diſorders are not *really* ſuch, than "we have, on the other hand, to con- "clude on the like account, that the "ſeeming order is not really ſuch; and "that, therefore, the ſame regard is due "in all caſes to *irregular* appearances as "to *regular*; that both ſhould be allow- "ed their whole weight undiminiſhed "by any conſiderations of our ignorance,

"and

" and our ſentiments be determined by " the *degree* in which we ſee, or think " we ſee, the one to prevail over the " other."——But a little attention will diſcover this way of arguing, in the preſent caſe, to be very fallacious. The poſition on which it is founded, " that unknown " relations may as well ſhew ſeeming " order to be diſorder as the contrary," is undoubtedly falſe. Order and regularity, we are ſure, wherever they are found, cannot but proceed from deſign and wiſdom; and it is not poſſible that any unknown relations ſhould deſtroy the appearance of them.—Thus; if we ſaw a million of things, diſpoſed regularly at the angles of a polygon of a million of equal ſides, we ſhould neceſſarily conclude that there was real order here, derived from knowledge and wiſdom; nor could we help reckoning it impertinent to object, that, if we knew all the relations of theſe things to others, we might perceive the contrary. But, on the other hand; ſuppoſing any number of objects to be diſ-

poſed *apparently* according to no order, we could not from hence conclude that this was *really* the caſe; becauſe it is not impoſſible but that their relations and correſpondencies to ſurrounding objects, did we perceive them, might ſhew us that they were diſpoſed in the moſt beautiful order.——In like manner, it would be very abſurd to ſay, that had we larger views we might diſcover, perhaps, that the eye was not made for ſeeing, or that the bodies of plants and animals are not the effects of art. But, it is by no means ſo to ſay of any appointments of nature, or parts of an animal body which *ſeem* irregular or uſeleſs, that, had we larger views, we might perceive them to be otherwiſe.——It is, therefore, evident that the *relations* of objects, or their *connexions* with other objects, may entirely alter what appears irregular in them, at the ſame time that they cannot affect what appears regular; and that, conſequently, contrary to what has been objected, there is the greateſt regard due to

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our ignorance when we contemplate the former, but none when we contemplate the latter. The one *muſt* be the effect of wiſdom, and the other *may*. From the appearance of deformity, or ill contrivance in an object, when ſeen in one poſition, or conſidered by itſelf, there may not ariſe the leaſt preſumption, that it will have the ſame appearance when ſeen in another poſition, or when conſidered as a part of an extenſive and complicated ſyſtem. How fooliſh may the meaſures taken by the rulers of a ſtate, or the inſtitutions of a civil polity, though in reality the wiſeſt poſſible, ſeem to a perſon not enough acquainted with the ſituation of the ſtate, or with the whole plan of the civil polity? How dull may a ſingle part of a muſical compoſition appear when heard alone, which yet, when heard in concert with the other parts, may make the moſt delightful harmony? How aukward may a beautiful and neceſſary member of a machine appear, when detached from the

reſt, or when viewed by one who ſees not its *reference* to the end of the machine? How confuſed does the ſyſtem of the world appear to a ſpectator on the earth, or according to the *Ptolemaick* ſyſtem; but how regular and harmonious is it according to the true ſyſtem, or as it would appear to a ſpectator in the ſun? Can it be excuſable not to bear in mind ſuch truths, when we contemplate Divine Providence? Or is it at all judging according to reaſon, not to make the allowances they require? Is there any one who, in examining any work of human art, would not impute to his ignorance whatever in it appeared not conſiſtent with the ſkill which the general frame of it diſcovered? Why is not this equally reaſonable with reſpect to the conſtitution of nature, where we find innumerable proofs of infinite wiſdom, and in the meaneſt productions of which is exhibited an incomprehenſible exactneſs of art and workmanſhip?

It may be worth adding here, that, being ourſelves part of nature, and deriving from the ſame original with it our very notions of order, it ſeems very incredible that we ſhould be able to correct nature, or to conceive and order greater and better than is to be found in it*.

There are two accounts to be given of the appearance of irregularities in nature. It may be occaſioned either by the reality of theſe irregularities; or by our ignorance, confined views, and diſadvantageous ſituation for obſerving nature. It may be owing either to a *real want* of wiſdom, or to the *infinity* and *unfathomableneſs* of it. The firſt of theſe accounts contradicts numberleſs *Phænomena* of nature; is inconſiſtent with the perfection of wiſdom apparent in the general frame of the world, and oppoſes our moſt reaſonable apprehenſions concerning the nature

* See Characteriſtics, Vol. II. p. 284.

Τις γαρ αν ειη φυσις τωδε (περικαλλεσατω κοσμω) μειζων, η γαρ αν ειποι τις, μερος αυτω εστι. Ariſt. de Mundo, Cap. V.

ture and attributes of the first cause. The latter account, on the contrary, is in the highest degree easy, natural, and obvious. 'Tis suggested to us by what we have experienced in similar instances, and agreeable to what, from the reason of the thing, we might have foreseen must have happened to such creatures as we are, in considering such a scheme as that of nature.—Can we then doubt a moment to which of these accounts we shall give the preference? Is it reasonable to suffer our conviction of a fact, for which we have good evidence, to be influenced by appearances that may as well be consistent as inconsistent with it; nay, by appearances that, on the supposition of its truth, we must beforehand have expected? Must it not be always proper to suspect our judgments in cases where we have often been mistaken, and where it is certain we must be particularly liable to mistake?

Let us here fix our thoughts again * on the structure of the human body. We know

* See page 57.

know it to be an effect of conſummate ſkill. But there are ſome of its parts the uſes and propriety of which we do not perceive. Can we ſuppoſe theſe parts to be really uſeleſs, and the human body, in ſuch inſtances, to be ill made? Or can it be poſſible for any perſon, in this caſe, to infer any more than the "imperfection of this knowledge?"—There is the very ſame reaſon againſt drawing any other concluſion from what is dark to us in the diſpenſations of Providence, and the government of events. ——What, in truth, would be moſt of all unaccountable is, that to Beings whoſe views are confined within the narroweſt limits of time and place, many parts of an infinite plan, contrived by infinite wiſdom, ſhould not appear unaccountable. It ought to ſatisfy us, that we ſee and know enough to convince us of the perfection of the Divine ways and works. To expect that they ſhould be fully underſtood by us, or that no difficulties ſhould embarraſs us in our enquiries into them,

them, would ſhew the moſt inexcuſable folly. It has happened, in many inſtances, that what for ſome time had been looked upon as faulty in the conſtitution of nature, has been found to be wiſe and good. This ought to teach us diffidence with regard to whatever we may ſtill be unable to account for. All the fancies of men, that they could mend God's works, or correct the order of the world, have hitherto proved nothing but their ignorance and preſumption. As new light has been ſtruck out, objections have vaniſhed, and the Divine works have ſhone with greater brightneſs. The further advances have been made in the knowledge of nature, and the more open it has been laid to our view, the more glorious it has appeared, and the ſtronger proofs have been diſcovered of the perfections of its author: And hence, what we ought in all reaſon to reckon upon is, that were we acquainted with the whole of nature, or had faculties for entering into the counſels of Providence, and diſcovering the connections and dependencies

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of all its parts, *every* irregularity would diſappear, and all that now puzzles us be found completely right and good. ——The chief difficulties occur juſt where we might expect them; in the ſtate of human affairs, and the management of the *moral* world. The ſcheme of the *natural* world lies more in one view before us, and has leſs dependence on paſt and future events; but that of the other, 'tis reaſonable to think, muſt be as much more deep laid as it is of greater importance. It muſt be of inconceivable extent as to *duration* as well as *place*, conſiſt of many *related periods*, and proceed through a long ſucceſſion of *ages*. If then of the former we are incompetent judges, how much more ſo muſt we be of the latter; and with what patience and hope ought we, under a ſenſe of our blindneſs, to wait till time ſhall unravel the ſcheme, and ſhew us more clearly the perfect order of the Divine government? ——In ſhort; that perſon is indeed hardly worthy of a place among God's works, who obſerves them

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ſo careleſsly as not to know, that there is a depth of wiſdom and contrivance in them which he cannot trace, and is not led from hence to implicit and hearty acquieſcence, *believing* where he does not *ſee*, and adoring where he finds himſelf incapable of comprehending.

The next obſervation I ſhall make on the objections I have mentioned is, that in general, they are founded too much on the unreaſonable and abſurd expectation "that the Deity ſhould act, in *every* "*ſingle inſtance*, to the utmoſt extent of "his power, and communicate the great-"eſt poſſible happineſs."——Happineſs, we know, is greatly prevalent in all we ſee of the world. Every diſtrict of it abounds with effects of the goodneſs of its maker. Our complaint then muſt be, not why is not goodneſs diſplayed in the conſtitution of nature, but why is not *more* goodneſs diſplayed. But let it be well conſidered, that this is a complaint, the foundation of which it is not poſſible to remove: For, had the happi-

happineſs communicated been ever ſo *great*, we might ſtill have aſked, why is it not *greater*?

As long as the ſum of the happineſs of any Being exceeds that of his miſeries, God is kind to him; nor does it make the leaſt difference to a Being, whether any particular quantity of happineſs with which he is bleſſed is pure and unmixed, or only the clear exceſs of his enjoyments above his ſufferings, or whether larger capacities of enjoyment are given him with proportionable deductions of ſufferings, or narrower capacities without any ſuch deductions.

As far, therefore, as the attribute of *goodneſs* is concerned, no objections can be made againſt any natural evils overbalanced by good, which may not equally be made againſt communicating a ſmaller, rather than a larger quantity of good, or granting narrower rather than greater capacities of happineſs.——— Thus; if the animals on this globe (ſuppoſing all along

along happineſs to *prevail* in their exiſtence) ſhould, be exempted from the greater calamities that befall them, they ſhould, for the ſame reaſon, be exempted from the ſmaller, and enjoy an uniform happineſs, without being, at any time, in the leaſt annoyed or diſturbed. This happineſs alſo they may expect to be the greateſt their natures are capable of, and to continue for ever. They ought, therefore, to be immortal, ſubject to no decay, liable to no accidents, and ſecure of enjoying every pleaſure in the higheſt poſſible degree. But we cannot ſtop here. For the ſame reaſon that they ought to be thus happy to the utmoſt extent of their capacities, they ought to have had higher capacities. But how extravagant is all this? At this rate, no finite or imperfect Being muſt ever be created.

'Tis a very different queſtion, how far the *wiſdom* of God appears in the mixed ſtate appointed to Beings: And ſo likewiſe

wiſe is the queſtion, how far his *juſtice* can be vindicated in the relative ſtates of mankind, conſidered as reaſonable agents of different moral characters.—— The chief difficulties attending the latter enquiry are removed by ſuppoſing a future ſtate; and with reſpect to the former, we know enough to be ſatisfied, that all the particular evils incident to Beings are under good direction, and that it is for the beſt reaſons that a mixed ſtate is appointed them. It deſerves particular notice, that many of the pains and evils to which all animals are liable, appear plainly to be deſigned as means to ſecure their happineſs and to guard them againſt harm, and are therefore, as much almoſt as any of their natural pleaſures and enjoyments, proofs both of the wiſdom and goodneſs of the Deity.

I have called the expectation that God, *in any ſingle inſtance*, ſhould produce the greateſt poſſible happineſs unreaſonable and abſurd. This is an extremely evi-

dent truth. But it ſhould be obſerved, that it by no means follows from hence, that, taking in the whole extent and duration of the creation, a quantity of abſolute good has not been produced which exceeds all that is poſſible to be conceived. Though only a limited quantity of happineſs can exiſt in any given number of limited effects, and though, therefore, all that we can reaſonably expect with regard to any ſingle parts of nature is, to ſee that good is prevalent, or that happineſs is deſigned and communicated, and to expect more would run us into the greateſt abſurdities, yet the entire plan of created exiſtence, reaching, perhaps from eternity to eternity, and extending through immenſity, may include in it *infinite*, or *infinitely infinite* happineſs.

But to diſmiſs this. It will be worth while here, to apply the preſent argument more particularly to the ſtate and circumſtances of man.——Various have been

been the complaints of the evils under which man groans, and the calamities to which he is liable. But if it muſt be granted, that he enjoys, on the whole, more pleaſure than he ſuffers pain; that his life and ſtate are in a high degree eligible, notwithſtanding the evils blended with them; and that the whole order of his nature, as it came from the hands of the Creator, is ſuch as proves him to have been deſigned for nothing but virtue and happineſs: If, I ſay, this muſt be granted, as ſurely it muſt, it ſhould go a great way towards ſilencing all objections and complaints. For it will follow that the meaning of them muſt be in a great meaſure this; "Why was "not man made *more* happy and per-"fect?" A queſtion which, agreeably to what was before obſerved, might have been aſked, though he had been placed ever ſo much higher in the ſcale of Being. ——Let then every objection of this kind be for ever exploded. Man, it is true, is a very frail, imperfect, and ſhort-lived

creature; but ſtill his exiſtence is better to him than non-exiſtence. Such a race is, at leaſt, *ſome* addition to the univerſal happineſs; and, therefore, it was an inſtance of divine goodneſs to produce it; and inſtead of murmuring, it becomes us rather to praiſe and adore.

But it will, probably, be thought, that no obſervations of this kind affect the main difficulty that occurs to us in conſidering Providence, which ariſes, "not "from the *natural* evils and imperfections "of man, but from what religion teaches "us concerning his circumſtances as a "*moral* agent, placed in a ſtate where he "is ſtrongly tempted to wickedneſs, and "where it muſt have been expected that "a general corruption would prevail, *all* "forfeit innocence, and *great numbers* fall "into the future puniſhment of ſin, and "be *loſt for ever*."——This is indeed an important difficulty; nor would I at all pretend to be able to give any adequate ſolution of it. Some obſervations, how-

however, there are, ſuggeſted by the preſent argument, which ſeem to leſſen its weight, and which, therefore, it will not be amiſs to propoſe.

Man ſeems to be in the loweſt order of reaſonable Beings, and from what has been ſaid, it appears that there are no objections againſt creating the loweſt order, which would not equally hold againſt creating any other order. Now, it is reaſonable to think, that intelligent agents, in the firſt period of their exiſtence, or antecedently to all ſecurity from experience and inſtruction, muſt be more liable to deviate than in any ſubſequent period; and it is certain, that thoſe in a lower order muſt be more frail and defectible than thoſe in a higher. What wonder then is it if of thoſe in the *loweſt* order, and who conſequently muſt be in the *greateſt* danger of deviation, many ſhould actually deviate, abuſe their liberty, and loſe the happineſs they might have ſecured?——It is

abſurd to aſk why was liberty granted them, ſince it is eſſential to intelligence, and to all rational and moral happineſs. Liberty then they muſt have, or not exiſt at all, and the conſequence of liberty, when expoſed to temptations and trials, muſt ſometimes be depravity and wickedneſs. And why ſhould not a liberty ſo circumſtanced be communicated, as well as a liberty more favourably circumſtanced*? Can it be aſſerted that all Beings have a right not to be placed in any diſadvantageous ſtates? Or, ſhould this be allowed, will it be aſſerted further, that they ought not even to be expoſed to the poſſibility of being ever brought into ſuch ſtates? As the Deity might not have given exiſtence at all, he may

* It ſhould be obſerved, that I ſuppoſe that *all* Beings might have been placed in ſuch circumſtances as that *none* of them, though poſſeſſed of perfect natural liberty, ſhould ever be in *danger* of any deviations or calamities: And the deſign of what is here ſaid, and of a good deal that follows, is to ſhew that we have no ſufficient reaſon to expect this; and alſo that, allowing it poſſible, it was not *beſt*.

may ſurely give it on any terms which are conſiſtent with its being in any degree a benefit, or not worſe than non-exiſtence. He cannot, therefore, be under an obligation to give it free from dangers and inconveniencies.——Antecedently to the creation of man, as many of the more perfect orders of creatures might have exiſted as can poſſibly be imagined, and the creation of man might make a further addition to the univerſal happineſs. Why then ſhould he not be created? ——Is it not moſt reaſonable to expect that Divine goodneſs ſhould diſplay itſelf in producing an endleſs variety of effects, and in giving exiſtence to every different order of creatures * capable of being happy?

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* What is here ſuggeſted ſhews, that the creation of a variety of orders of creatures is not only conſiſtent with goodneſs, but required by it.——But there is another obſervation which ſhews this in a different manner, and which, though particular uſe will be made of it again, it will not be amiſs juſt to mention on this occaſion. Had there been no ine-

Theſe obſervations are ſufficient to prove, that the perfections of the Deity by

qualities among Beings, there could have been no room for beneficence; no poſſibility of gratifying the deſire of doing good; no opportunities for exerciſing virtue in one of its higheſt inſtances, and that principle in rational Being, which affords a happineſs the moſt worthy of a rational nature, muſt have lain for ever dormant and uſeleſs. *See Mr. Abernethy's Sermons*, Vol. II. Serm. III. See likewiſe the ingenious and worthy Mr. Amory's twenty-two ſermons. Serm. XII, from p. 344, to p. 348.

I cannot forbear adding in this place, that it ſeems to me very improper to ſay, as ſome have done, that God choſe this ſyſtem, in which evil takes place, as the beſt of all poſſible ſyſtems. It is difficult to ſay what can be meant by the beſt of all poſſible ſyſtems. If it ſignifies that which includes the *greateſt* ſum of happineſs, it is as inconceivable as the *longeſt* of all durations, or the *largeſt* of all numbers. Thoſe perſons muſt have low ideas of God's works who can look upon this earth, with its connexions, or even the whole viſible univerſe of ſun, planets, and fixed ſtars, as at all conſiderable, when compared with the reſt of the creation. At the time, therefore, this ſyſtem was produced, there might have been numberleſs other ſyſtems, containing brighter diſplays of infinite power and goodneſs, not only *poſſible* but *actually exiſtent*. All that we can reaſonably expect to ſee in what falls under *our* notice of the works and

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by no means required that ſuch a race as ours ſhould not exiſt. When conſidered by itſelf we ſee enough, notwithſtanding the difficulties that we meet with, to convince us that it is the effect of wiſdom and goodneſs: and when conſidered in its relation to the whole ſyſtem of Beings, we know not how important purpoſes it may ſerve.

It is particularly neceſſary on this argument to bear in mind, that *ſufficient* advantages are ſuppoſed to be granted to all, and that nothing is expected from any Being which is not equitably proportioned to the light and opportunities he enjoys.——If ſome have fewer advantages than others, all have more than they can claim; and from all as much leſs will be required, as they have had leſs given them. If ſome have a ſmaller

ways of God is, that they are entirely right and good, and worthy of his perfections. To deſire more, or to expect that this ſyſtem ſhould be the beſt, the faireſt, and happieſt poſſible, is the ſame as to expect that there ſhould be no ſubordination or variety in the Divine works.

ſmaller chance for happineſs than others, all have *ſome* chance, and every one might have had none at all, that is, might never have exiſted. Happineſs is always a free gift from God, and he may make Beings liable to come ſhort of it, in any degree he ſees beſt. Any *capacity*, any *poſſibility* of happineſs is valuable for the ſame reaſon that happineſs itſelf is ſo, and ought to be received with gratitude. Nay, ſuch at preſent are our circumſtances, that we have indeed reaſon for the utmoſt gratitude. We have before us the proſpect of a *bleſſed immortality* which we cannot loſe, but through our own fault.——Far then be it from us to accuſe our Maker.—— It is in your power to ſecure *infinite* happineſs. All the means neceſſary for this are given you. Nothing but voluntary and inexcuſable guilt can hurt you. Praiſe God, therefore. Improve carefully the advantages you are bleſt with; and be not ſo unreaſonable as to complain becauſe you are not ſaved the

care and pains you muſt uſe in working out your ſalvation; for this is a complaint which nothing can ſatisfy, beſides granting you every poſſible advantage, placing you above all labour and hazard, and making you abſolutely indefectible.

The argument on which I here inſiſt is, I think, ſufficient to teach us a humble and thankful acquieſcence in the condition allotted us. But it would ſcarcely be right to omit obſerving, that there is a great deal more to be ſaid in the preſent caſe, and particularly in vindication of Providence, with reſpect to that ſtate of labour and danger in which we are placed. I ſhall, therefore, beg leave to digreſs ſo far as to introduce a few obſervations on this ſubject, not immediately connected with the main argument which I am purſuing.

The fact that our ſtate is a ſtate of labour and danger is too obvious to be queſtioned. There is nothing in human life

life ſtable and certain. There is nothing given us ſo freely that we are to uſe no pains to obtain or preſerve it. Almoſt all the bleſſings of our Being are to be earned by diligence, if we would poſſeſs them. Such is the Divine eſtabliſhment, that the lazy and indolent muſt be deficient and unhappy. But what deſerves moſt of our notice is, that part of the precarioufneſs of our ſtate which is cauſed by its dependence on our fellow-beings. There is not, I think, any fact in the conſtitution of the world which is more remarkable than this; or which, at firſt ſight, ſeems to contradict more our ideas of Divine goodneſs. How common is it for one man to have at his command the fates of whole provinces and kingdoms? Even our receiving exiſtence, as well as our condition afterwards, is made to depend on the wills of our fellow-beings. In the beginning of life we are committed to the care of parents or guardians, who can, almoſt as they pleaſe, determine our ſtate in future life, or cut

us off entirely from it. What is ſimilar to this is true of our ſtate as moral agents deſigned for exiſtence hereafter. As an infant is put in the way to the happineſs of the preſent life, ſo is a grown man put in the way to happineſs in another world, and naturally capable of everlaſting improvement in knowledge and perfection. And as, in our former capacity, it is put into the power of men to cauſe us to fail of the happineſs we might have enjoyed in life; ſo likewiſe, in our latter capacity, it is put into their power, by various means, to deprive us of future happineſs, and to cauſe us to miſcarry for ever.

What has been already ſaid is of great uſe to ſilence the complaints which are apt to riſe within us againſt this part of the conſtitution of nature, and can hardly be too much inculcated. We had no right to exiſtence or happineſs at all, and therefore the Deity may make them dependent and precarious in whatever manner

manner his counſels require. But we need not reſt the defence of Providence on any argument of this kind. We are capable, I think, of perceiving very important reaſons for ſuch a conſtitution, and of diſcovering that it diſplays great wiſdom and goodneſs.

It is abſolutely neceſſary, as was obſerved page 94, that intelligent Beings ſhould have ſcope given them for action. There is a plain congruity in making their happineſs to ariſe from the proper exerciſe of their powers, and to be the reſult of their own endeavours. This is the only happineſs that can ſuit the natures of active and free creatures. Had they no command over events; were bliſs forced upon them, independently of their own choice and endeavours; or were their ſtates ſo immutably fixed as not to be liable to be affected by one another, the conſequence would be, that they would have nothing to do; that their faculties would be given them in vain;

vain; that virtue would be totally excluded from the creation, and an univerſal ſtagnation or quietiſm take place in it.

But I ſhall, on this occaſion, deſire particular attention to the following obſervations, which, I fancy, will ſtrengthen ſome of thoſe already made, and ſhew us plainly what unreaſonable expectations we are apt to entertain from the goodneſs of God.

Had the natural courſe of things in the preſent ſtate been ſuch, that whenever any particular calamities or accidents happened to men, there ſhould have been no remedies for them; we could have had no juſt reaſon for complaint, and God would have been good. Nor could any arguments have been taken from this attribute to prove that there ought to have been remedies provided, which would not equally have proved that they ought to be eaſy, univerſal and infallible,

or

or rather that there ſhould have been no occaſion for them, and no ſufferings or pains of any kind. But the fact is, that there are remedies provided for the misfortunes and calamities of men, and that thus greater goodneſs is in this inſtance diſplayed in the conſtitution of nature, than we could on any ſure grounds have antecedently expected. Men are not left, as they might have been, to periſh irretrievably by the calamities that happen to them, but it is put into their power in numberleſs caſes to help one another, and to prevent the fatal effects that would follow particular calamities. A proviſion is made in the ſpontaneous agency and benevolence of our fellow-creatures, for a great addition to the happineſs of life, and diminution of its ſufferings. And this itſelf becomes a ſtill higher diſplay of goodneſs beyond which we cannot eaſily enlarge our ideas. For by eſtabliſhing a plan wherein Beings are thus left to be the voluntary cauſes of one another's

another's happineſs, room is given them for the exerciſe of beneficence, for gratifying the nobleſt affection in their natures, and enjoying the moſt Godlike bliſs of which they are capable. Had nature been framed agreeably to what might have appeared, to our narrow views, beſt and moſt productive of happineſs, there would probably have been no ſuch liableneſs to calamitous events, or dependence of Beings on one another, as we obſerve in it; and, conſequently, the higheſt kind of happineſs would have been wanting in it; and the very end we meant to ſecure would have been defeated.

What has been here ſaid of the conſtitution of things in the preſent world, may, I ſuppoſe, be applicable in a great meaſure to the whole plan of Providence and ſyſtem of being. The welfare of a *ſpecies*, like that of *individuals* among men, may be made dependent on a higher ſpecies, and whole orders of

reaſonable creatures may be ſo circumſtanced, as to be liable to be brought into very calamitous ſtates, from which it may not be poſſible for them to be ſaved, according to the general laws of the world, except by the kind aſſiſtance and labours of Beings ſuperior to them. And from what I have obſerved, we ſee reaſon to believe that ſuch a general oeconomy of nature, though the reſult in ſome inſtances may prove abortion and ruin, was neceſſary to produce the greateſt virtue, and the greateſt good on the whole. —It is an enquiry of ſome importance here how far the dependence of Beings on one another may extend; or within what limits it can be conſiſtent with rectitude, that they ſhould be liable to ſuffer in conſequence of one another's agency. I have already hinted ſome obſervations on this head in the preceeding ſection. We may be aſſured, in general, that the connexions of Beings are under the beſt regulations, and their powers wiſely limited: And we may alſo know, in

particular,

particular, that their dependence on one another cannot extend ſo far as that there ſhall ever happen a failure of *adequate retribution*, or that any Beings ſhall be liable to be deprived of any of their *unalienable* rights, or to ſuffer any thing which it would be wrong or hard that, as the creatures of the Deity, they ſhould ſuffer. The powers, therefore, of Beings over one another cannot extend further than to the *gifts of bounty*, or ſuch bleſſings as the Deity is not *obliged* to grant. Of this kind are exiſtence, its perpetuity, and almoſt all its privileges, capacities, and advantages: And therefore, it may be eaſily conceived what degradations and loſſes may be ſometimes brought upon Beings under the Divine government, in conſequence of their mutual agency, conſiſtently with the moſt perfect juſtice, and even (if ſome of the preceding obſervations are right) as the effect of a conſtitution formed in the beſt manner to produce happineſs.—But the queſtion, how far the dependence of Beings on one

another may extend, would carry me beyond my preſent purpoſe were I to attempt a proper diſcuſſion of it, nor is there any occaſion for now entering into it further.

It is right, I have ſaid, that the happineſs of intelligent Beings ſhould be made to be the fruit of what they *do* and *deſerve*. The nobleſt enjoyments, or all which pre-ſuppoſe moral merit, can have no other ſource; and virtue (ſince its nature will not admit of its being either created with Beings, or taught them) muſt always be an *acquiſition*. Theſe conſiderations, when applied to the ſubject into which I am enquiring, have a conſiderable tendency to render it leſs puzzling. It is ſcarcely conceivable that an agent, in working out his own happineſs and acquiring virtue by attention and care, ſhould not be in circumſtances of ſome hazard; and if this is true, the enquiry concerning the origin of evil muſt be, not, why any Beings have been placed in

in a ſtate of trial and hazard, but why they have been placed in a ſtate of trial and hazard, attended with ſuch and ſuch circumſtances of particular diſadvantage and diſtreſs.

Upon the whole. We may, I think, perceive that it was neceſſary that there ſhould be a real *contingency* of events in the creation, and ſuch a ſubordination of Beings to one another and *precariouſneſs* of their ſtates, as could not but ſubject them in many inſtances, and eſpecially in the infancy of their exiſtence, to the danger of moral defection and a failure of happineſs. There could not otherwiſe, it has appeared, have been room for a proper exertion of the powers of Beings, or for that *moral excellence* by which they moſt nearly reſemble the fountain of all perfection. The *righteſt* and alſo the *greateſt* happineſs could not have been attained in any other way. This appears to me with ſtrong evidence, and the reaſons that have been aſſigned ſeem

to prove it.—But it is time to return to what I intended here chiefly to inſiſt upon.

I was conſidering the objection againſt Providence ariſing from the diſadvantageous ſtate we are in for virtue, and particularly, from what muſt have been the foreſeen conſequence of it; that future *final* loſs of a great part of mankind which religion teaches us to expect*. I have ſaid a *great part* of mankind. How great

* I beg it may be remembered that I all along conſider the loſs or deſtruction of the Being, as the main circumſtance in the future puniſhment. My whole reaſoning in what follows muſt appear trifling to thoſe who do not attend to this; and if on this opinion of the future puniſhment the ways of God can be vindicated, there is no other which any perſon of much reflexion is likely to embrace, on which they may not be vindicated.—The difficulties to be removed are evidently much leſs on the ſuppoſition of the *ultimate reſtoration* of all mankind; but this opinion is by no means reconcileable to the language of ſcripture; and there is reaſon to believe, that the conſequences of vice will be found far more terrible.

great a part can be known only to that Being who ſees through all futurity, and who ſearches all hearts. —— When I conſider the careleſſneſs which ſeems to prevail with reſpect to religious virtue; the inexcuſable defects of ſome who are ranked among the better ſort of men; the ſcope of the chriſtian doctrine, and ſeveral intimations of ſcripture; I am indeed forced to entertain melancholy reflections. Every benevolent mind will, however, endeavour to think on this ſubject as favourably as poſſible. There is enough in the fact, as it muſt appear to the largeſt charity, to render it in the higheſt degree alarming, and to awaken in us the deepeſt concern for ourſelves and our fellow-men. Millions of reaſonable Beings, naturally immortal and capable of infinite improvement, bereaved of all their hopes, cut off from every bleſſing of exiſtence, caſt away *for ever* from God and bliſs, and ſunk in *irrecoverable deſtruction!*—What can be imagined more ſhocking?—But though ſuch a fact cannot but greatly affect an attentive mind,

it furniſhes with no juſt reaſons for cenſuring Providence. God, notwithſtanding, appears to be good, *infinitely* good. No concluſion to the contrary could be drawn, were there ever ſo great a diſproportion between the number of thoſe who ſhall be ſaved, and thoſe who will be loſt. One may even venture to aſſert, that it would have been worth while to have created this world for the ſake of only *one* perſon to be ſaved out of it, and fitted in it for *everlaſting* happineſs *.—But, thanks be to *Divine* love, the virtuous and happy part of our ſpecies, when they ſhall hereafter

* This aſſertion cannot appear ſtrange to one who does not forget what was ſaid in the laſt note. Let the reader conſider, what a difference there is between ſaying, that the *happineſs* of one will make amends for the *miſery* of millions; and ſaying, that the *everlaſting* happineſs of one will make amends for the *loſs* of millions. The latter is my aſſertion, and not the former.——*Everlaſting* happineſs is *infinite* happineſs; and it is ſpeaking very low to ſay, that the maintenance of a world for thouſands of years, may not be too much to bring *one* perſon to it.

after be ſeparated from the reſt of mankind, will appear to be *a great multitude, which no one can number, gathered out of all nations, and kindred, and people, and tongues**. Nay, we cannot tell how much greater a proportion they will, on the whole, bear to the reſt of mankind, than the ſtate of things hitherto in this world has given us reaſon to hope. For it is not impoſſible but that, before the end of the preſent ſtate, a general reformation may take place, and knowledge, peace, and virtue prevail much more than they have ever yet done †. This many have thought

* Rev. vii. 9.

† It is the opinion of ſome that the world has from the firſt been gradually improving, and that it will go on to improve 'till ſuperſtition and wickedneſs ſhall be in a great meaſure exterminated. The advances and diſcoveries made within the three laſt centuries are, indeed, wonderful, and may well lead us to expect an approaching general amendment in human affairs. The light which has been lately ſtruck out will probably increaſe; and the more it increaſes

thought a reaſonable object of expectation, and it ſeems to be very plainly foretold in the ſcriptures.——But be this as it will; while all *may*, a great number, we cannot

increaſes, the further will free enquiry and generous ſentiments ſpread; the harder will it be for eſtabliſhed corruptions to maintain their ground; and the more the way will be prepared for the downfall of all ſaviſh hierarchies and governments, and for the introduction of thoſe times, when truth and liberty ſhall triumph over all oppoſition, when nation ſhall no more lift up a ſword againſt nation, every falſe religion be deſtroyed, and the *kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of the Lord and of his Chriſt*.—I cannot think it neceſſary that the world ſhould continue for ever divided, as it is now, into a multitude of independent ſtates whoſe jarring intereſts are always producing war and devaſtation. A ſcheme of government may be imagined that ſhall, by annihilating property and reducing mankind to their natural equality, remove moſt of the cauſes of contention and wickedneſs. An account of ſuch a ſcheme has been given by an ingenious writer in a book intitled, *Proſpects of Nature, Mankind, and Providence*.—It is there obſerved, that if a government of this kind ſhould be once eſtabliſhed on any ſpot, the advantages of it would be ſo viſible, and it would ſtrengthen and extend itſelf ſo faſt, that in time it would be very likely to become univerſal,

not doubt, *will* eſcape the fatal effects of vice, and be brought through the dangers of this world to endleſs bliſs.—It may be enquired here, why the circumſtances of the world have not been ſo ordered, as that this number ſhould be greater; and ſome of the principal objections againſt Providence are reducible to this enquiry: But it is one of that ſort of enquiries which has been before ſhewn to be unreaſonable. It is an enquiry which might have been made, though this number had been greater, or though it had been ſo great as to include every individual of mankind. For, on this laſt ſuppoſition, the ſame general principal would have led an objector to aſk; "Why are not more of mankind brought "on the ſtage, ſince more may?" Why "is the earth ſo thinly ſtocked with them, "ſince it might have been always full?" "Or, though always full. Why was it "not made larger, or created ſooner?" In ſhort; had this earth been ſo little as to be capable of holding only a number of men equal to thoſe who will be formed in it,

it, as it is now, for future happineſs, and had all theſe been ſo advantageouſly circumſtanced as that not one of them ſhould miſcarry: Had this, I ſay, been the caſe, it would ſcarcely have been thought that there was room for complaint, or the leaſt reaſon for queſtioning the goodneſs of the Deity. But to the views of benevolence there can be no difference between ſuch an earth and the preſent, the quantity of happineſs reſulting from both being, by ſuppoſition, the ſame. This is true of two ſuch ſtates, abſtracting from all connexions. What they may be when viewed in the relations they may have to other ſtates, or when conſidered as parts of a ſyſtem, it is not poſſible for us to diſcover. There may in this caſe be a preference due to the latter; or it may be the unvoidable reſult of a general plan of government productive, on the whole, of the greateſt abſolute good *. See page 127—131.

There

* I am ſenſible that many perſons will think that I ought here to have taken notice of the good

There is one obſervation more of a particular nature on the preſent ſubject, which

which may ariſe out of the evil of the world, and the important ends which the abortive part of mankind may be made to ſerve under the Divine government. It has been ſaid particularly to this purpoſe, that the future puniſhment of wicked men will be the means of diſplaying to the creation, in a manner not otherwiſe poſſible, the dreadful nature of vice and the perfect holineſs of the Deity; that it is owing to them that the preſent ſtate is a proper ſchool of virtue to that part of mankind who will eſcape the *ſecond death*, and that, for this reaſon, they anſwer an end like that of dung in a garden which, though itſelf loathſome, helps the growth of ſome choice plants, which in proper time are to be removed to a more conſpicuous ſpot, where they will ſhew themſelves in their finiſhed form and beauty.—Such is the doctrine which ſome of the beſt writers have taught; and they have added, that this doctrine ought not to have any influence on our notions of the evil of vice, becauſe, whatever good may eventually ariſe from it in conſequence of the diſpoſals of infinite wiſdom, its eſſential malignity is the ſame; it is always fatal to the individuals who practiſe it; and it ſtill continues true, not only that its *tendency* is to ruin the creation, but that this would be its *actual effect* were it under

which is ſo important that it would be inexcuſable to omit it. What I have in view is the conformity obſerved by Dr. *Butler*, between that loſs of human creatures which I have been conſidering, and the courſe of nature in other inſtances.—Vid. *Analogy*, Part I. Chap. 5.

under no reſtraint. — I leave every one to determine for himſelf how far theſe obſervations are juſt. For my own part, I am afraid of talking much in this way; and, perhaps, it will in ſome meaſure appear from what is above ſaid, that there is no great occaſion for it in order to vindicate Providence in the permiſſion of evil. It is right to think of vice as always an enemy to the world, and of the havock it makes among mankind as a *real* and great calamity. The founder of our religion certainly thought thus, otherwiſe he would not have ſtooped ſo low and ſuffered ſo much, to prevent the effects of vice and to ſave mankind. This appears likewiſe from the laws and threatenings of the Deity, and from all that we ſee of the order of his government. The wicked may with no leſs truth be conſidered as the *weeds* and *briars* that choak the plants, than as the *manure* that helps their growth. If the temptations and difficulties of human life are the means *ſometimes* of improving virtue, by affording it exerciſe, they are alſo *generally* the very cauſes which overwhelm and ruin it.

Almoſt-all kinds of vegetables and trees have a vaſt profuſion of ſeeds prepared for them, far the greateſt part of which is loſt; and, in ſome inſtances, not one of them in many myriads grow up to any thing. The like is very obſervable in the animal world; and were one to enter minutely into this part of natural hiſtory, it would be ſurpriſing to obſerve what a ſuperfluity of eggs is provided for ſome inſects, what an inconceivable multitude of creatures are loſt in embryo, or born only to be deſtroyed; and what great numbers of even thoſe that proceed ſome way towards a ſtate of maturity periſh before they arrive at it.

Should it be ſaid here that, as this world is conſtituted, a great waſte of this ſort could not but happen, which rendered it neceſſary that a conſiderable overplus ſhould be provided; and that the greatneſs of the numbers loſt cannot be regarded by a Being in whoſe eye nothing is great, to whom the production

of any one number of any objects is as eaſy as the production of any other; and who, therefore, can with no more reaſon be cenſured for any ſuch loſs, than for the non-exiſtence of the Beings he has not created: Should this, I ſay, be objected, it would be obvious to anſwer, that what is in ſome degree equivalent to it, may, with equal reaſon, be applied to the particular caſe under conſideration.

In thinking of the analogy of nature in this inſtance, we ſhould by no means forget the untimely deaths that happen among our own ſpecies. Many periſh in the womb; and the greater part of thoſe that ſee the light, and are put in the way to the enjoyments and happineſs of grown men in the preſent life, fall ſhort of them, and are nipped in their bloom. Such facts as theſe have a tendency to make the deepeſt impreſſion on every conſiderate perſon. They ſhew us that what we are taught to believe with reſpect

ſpect to the future lot of mankind is entirely agreeable to all that we ſee of the world*. Nor have we any reaſon for ſuſpecting

* In order to give a diſtincter view of that part of natural hiſtory which I have mentioned above, I will recite the following facts.—Monſieur *Dodart*, in a piece communicated to the Royal Academy of Sciences, computes that an elm every year, at a medium, produces 330,000 ſeeds, and, therefore, ſuppoſing it to live a hundred years, 33 millions during its whole age.—Fern is vaſtly more fruitful in ſeeds. — Hart's tongue, as Dr. *Grew* calculates, produces in a year a million of ſeeds. "There is "an infinite diverſity between the places that pro- "duce and nouriſh different plants. There are ſome "that are not produced but upon other particular "plants, of which the trunk, or the bark, or the "roots have alone the juice that is agreeable to "them. What Monſieur Tournefort has heard "from Meſſieurs Mery and Lemery is yet more "ſurpriſing. There are a kind of muſhrooms "which grow upon the bands and plaiſters applied "to the wounds and ſores of the ſick men in the "hoſpital called L'Hotel-Dieu. After this nobody "will wonder that horſe-dung prepared, as Monſieur "Tournefort mentions, ſhould be a kind of ſoil or "bed, capable of bringing forth the ordinary "muſhrooms. It follows from hence, that the

ſuſpecting that this part of its conſtitution is faulty, as, I hope, the preceding obſervations

" ſeeds of muſhrooms muſt be ſcattered in a pretty " large quantity, in an infinite number of places " where they never appear, and indeed over all the " earth; and by conſequence, likewiſe, the inviſible " ſeeds of a great number of other plants. — It " muſt be owned that the imagination is ſhocked " at firſt, with the conſideration of ſuch a pro- " digious multitude of different ſeeds ſown every " where indifferently; and in an infinity of places, " in vain too. And yet, when one comes to weigh " the matter, one muſt allow it. From whence " come otherwiſe the marſhy plants that are found " in lands turned to fens, and which never " appeared there before? From whence come " thoſe new plants that other accidents ſeem to " have produced ſometimes in certain places; for " inſtance, the black poppies that grow in the " burnt grounds of Languedoc, in Provence, and " in the iſles of the Archipelago, and which are " ſeen no more the following years? From whence " that great quantity of *Eryſinum latifolium majus* " *glabrum* which appeared after the fire of London " upon more than 200 acres of ground where that " happened? — Theſe kinds of facts, and many " others which one might alledge, equally incon- " teſtible, prove, at the ſame time, both the great " multitude of ſeeds ſcattered every where, and the " want

obſervations will prove. It is obvious that the main objections to it lead us equally

" want of certain circumſtances to make them " appear. — If to this ſpeculation on the inviſible " ſeeds of plants, we join that of the inviſible eggs " of inſects, which is exactly parallel, the earth " will be found full of an inconceivable number of " vegetables and animals already perfectly formed " and deſigned in miniature, and which only ſtay " for certain favourable accidents to appear in full " length." *See the lives of the French, Italian, and German Philoſophers, late members of the Royal Academy of Sciences at Paris, together with abſtracts of ſome of the choiceſt pieces communicated by them to that illuſtrious ſociety. By* Mr. *Chamberlayne.* — A ſpider lays, as naturaliſts tell us, five or ſix hundred eggs. — As the notion of ſpontaneous generation is now univerſally exploded, how ſhall we account for the inſects that never fail to be bred in particular places, or for the animalcules that are found in certain infuſions, after expoſing them uncovered to the air, except by ſuppoſing that the eggs of theſe animals are continually wafted about every where in the air? What an infinity then of theſe eggs muſt be loſt for want of falling into favourable ſituations? — Some have maintained that the bodies of all living creatures are produced from the animalcules *in ſemine maſculino*, which when they happen to find a proper *nidus*, are there changed, and for ſome time nouriſhed

equally to object, in all caſes, to the creation of a ſmaller rather than a greater number

riſhed and enlarged, till at laſt the creature in its complete form is ripened for birth; juſt as all trees and plants proceed from a ſeed, which is nothing but the tree or plant itſelf in miniature, and which, upon being thrown into a proper ſoil, is there, not formed, but unfolded, nouriſhed and encreaſed, till it becomes a full grown plant or tree. If this opinion is true, it affords a moſt remarkable inſtance to the preſent purpoſe, there being no reaſon to think, conſidering the inconceivable number of the animalcules mentioned, that one out of many millions of them ever find the proper *nidus*, or actually give riſe to the animals intended to be produced from them.—Exactly parallel to this, is the account given by naturaliſts of the conſtruction and uſe of the flower which precedes the fruit, in plants, and trees, and of the manner in which the *farina*, or fine duſt of flowers fecundifies the *germen* or ſeed placed at the bottom of the flower. Mr. *Samuel Moreland* in Philoſophical Tranſactions, N°. 287, (after giving an account of a well known part of natural philoſophy, namely, that there is in every ſeed a ſeminal plant lodged between the two lobes which conſtitute the bulk of the ſeed, and are deſigned for the firſt nouriſhment of the plant) mentions it as his opinion, that the ſeeds which come up in their proper *involucra*, are at firſt like unimpregnated *ova* of animals;

number of Beings. There is nothing like *injuſtice*, or even *unkindneſs*, implied in

animals; that the *farina* is a congeries of ſeminal plants, one of which muſt be conveyed into every *ovum* before it can become prolific; that the *piſtil* is a tube deſigned to convey theſe ſeminal plants into their neſts in the *ova*; and that there is ſo vaſt a proviſion made becauſe of the odds there are, whether one out of a great number ſhall ever find its way through ſo narrow a conveyance.—This theory has been received by Mr. *Geoffroy* and many others. It ſeems now pretty well confirmed, and has laid the foundation of the *Linnæan* ſyſtem of botany. How remarkably does it ſhew us the analogy that runs through nature! How ſurprifing to conſider what an expence of *farina* there is to produce *one* ſeed, and what an expence of ſeeds to produce *one* plant?—Is it impoſſible that what is ſimilar to this ſhould take place in the formation of reaſonable Beings in this world for happineſs hereafter? —"that the preſent "world (ſays Dr. *Butler* in the paſſage above referred "to) does not actually become a ſtate of moral diſ- "cipline to many, even the generality, cannot be "urged as a proof that it was not intended for moral "diſcipline, by any who at all obſerve the analogy of "nature. For, of the numerous ſeeds of vegetables "and bodies of animals which are adapted and put "in the way to improve to ſuch a point or ſtate of

in it to any Being. It is conſiſtent with an infinite overbalance of good; and, for theſe

"natural maturity and perfection, we do not ſee
"perhaps one in a million actually to improve to it,
"Far the greateſt part of them decay before they
"are improved to it; and appear to be abſolutely
"deſtroyed. —— I cannot forbear adding, that the
"appearance of ſuch an amazing waſte in nature,
"with reſpect to theſe ſeeds and bodies, by foreign
"cauſes, is to us as unaccountable as what is much
"more terrible, the preſent and future ruin of ſo
"many moral agents, by themſelves, *i. e.* by vice."

There is a further circumſtance in the conſtitution of nature applicable to the preſent purpoſe, which ſeems to be worthy of notice, and which I will mention as briefly as poſſible. — One of the moſt remarkable and diſtinguiſhing properties of human nature is, its *capacity of improvement*. What the lower creatures were at firſt, they are now, and probably ever will be. But this is by no means the caſe with men. Previouſly to all advantages from experience and inſtruction, they are nearly the ſavages deſcribed by Mr. *Rouſſeau*, (*See his Treatiſe on the Origin of the Inequality among Mankind*) or creatures running naked and wild in the woods, without reflection, without ſociety, and without language. Compare them in this ſtate with what they are capable of becoming by a due application of their powers, by the invention of arts and ſciences,

theſe reaſons, the mere circumſtance of its unaccountableneſs as occaſioning a *waſte*

ſciences, and the eſtabliſhment of the beſt ſchemes of civil policy; and a difference will appear not inferior to that between men and the loweſt ſpecies of brutes, or between the wiſeſt perſon on earth and a child juſt born.—This *natural improveableneſs* of the human race has never taken its complete effect. The greateſt part of men have, from the beginning of the world, been in a ſtate of darkneſs and barbariſm. Many ages paſt before the diſcovery of any of thoſe arts, from whence are derived the chief conveniencies of life: And though now, in conſequence of the acquiſitions of ſome thouſands of years, human life in a few nations appears in a ſtate of conſiderable order and dignity, yet ſtill it is farther than can be well imagined, from having attained any where to a ſtate ſo improved and happy as we ſee it to be capable of. —— This loſs of the effect of human improveableneſs will appear equally remarkable, if we conſider the individuals of mankind.—Thouſands of Boyles, Clarkes and Newtons have probably been loſt to the world, and lived and died in ignorance and meanneſs, merely for want of being placed in favourable ſituations, and enjoying proper advantages. — Such has been the caſe with mankind, conſidered as deſigned only for exiſtence in this world. But they are capable of exiſting in a

waſte of being (which is the moſt that is puzzling in it) cannot be of any great conſequence. The *ſeeming waſte* may, for ought we know, anſwer important ends, and appear at laſt to be the greateſt *frugality*. How hard is it that we ſhould be willing to truſt the wiſdom of nature no further than it keeps within ſight? How inconceivable is it that, in this or any other inſtance, a creature of yeſterday and a reptile of the duſt ſhould be able to ſee further, or to contrive better, than that *original intelligence* from whence all things ſprung?——— I feel particular ſatisfaction whenever I make ſuch reflexions, and therefore I hope I ſhall be excuſed if I am too often recurring to them.

I have now propoſed the thoughts which have appeared to me of moſt conſequence,

higher ſtate. They are capable of an *endleſs* future progreſs in knowledge and happineſs. — Can any one ſay, that the effect alſo of their improveableneſs in this reſpect may not fail in numberleſs inſtances?

conſequence, towards reconciling our minds to our ſtate, conſidered as a mixed and imperfect ſtate; a ſtate of labour, temptation, and danger; and a ſtate in which many are likely to fail of future happineſs, and to be loſt for ever. Some of the obſervations which have been made on the head laſt mentioned, have gone on the ſuppoſition, that the virtuous part of mankind are not only to be equitably diſtinguiſhed from others in proportion to the difference of their characters, but to be rewarded hereafter with an *endleſs life* in a ſtate of ever increaſing happineſs. As we have reaſon to think this to be the fact, it makes no great difference with reſpect to the argument on which I have inſiſted, how it comes to be fact; whether, for inſtance, it is to be conſidered as derived from the *original conſtitution* of the Deity, or as the effect of an *extraordinary diſpenſation* of mercy. In juſtice, however, to what the Chriſtian Revelation has taught us, I cannot diſmiſs this ſubject without obſerving, that the latter is in reality the truth.

truth. The Scriptures are expreſs and clear in repreſenting Chriſt as the author of *eternal life*, or our *reſtorer* to immortality. The account there given ſeems to be, that we were indeed at firſt intended for immortality, but that in conſequence of certain events at the commencement of the preſent ſtate, we loſt it, and were brought into ſuch circumſtances of diſtreſs as gave occaſion to the interpoſition of the Meſſiah, by whoſe benevolent agency our race has been ſo far delivered, that all the truly penitent ſhall eſcape the *ſecond death*, and be made happy for ever.——As one who believes Chriſtianity, I am obliged to think this a true account; and there are ſeveral reaſons which determine me to think it an account entirely credible. Death has in it all the appearance of being an evil, for which ſuch creatures as we are might not be originally intended. The beſt of us have expoſed themſelves to the conſequences of guilt in many inſtances. I cannot conceive, why it ſhould be thought unlikely,

unlikely, that *ſuch* Beings ſhould be in a ſtate which (though perfectly right conſidered in its reference to the Divine adminiſtration) may yet be a *degraded* or *fallen* ſtate, and ſuch as might have needed ſuch a Saviour as Jeſus Chriſt——— I ſhould be carried far beyond the purpoſe of this Diſſertation were I to ſay much more here. I will therefore advance no further than to offer a few hints, in order to ſhew what force ſome of the arguments already propoſed have to vindicate Divine Providence, even on the ſuppoſition that our real ſtate is that now mentioned.

It has been proved, I think, that there is no reaſon to look upon our preſent ſtate as, in any reſpect, inconſiſtent with the perfections of the Deity*. Moſt certainly then

* If any one ſhould ſuſpect an inconſiſtency in ſaying that our ſtate is calamitous, and yet a ſtate that diſplays God's goodneſs, and in which we might have been originally placed, let him put the

then, it is a ſtate into which he might have made us liable to be brought in conſequence of any connexions proper to be eſtabliſhed in the univerſe. We ſee among the *individuals* of mankind that, in conſequence of their dependence on one another, they are often deprived of benefits which ſeemed to be intended for them by the conſtitution of the Deity, and brought into ſtates which, tho' they give no reaſon for complaining of Providence, are yet juſtly deemed calamitous. How credible is it that there may alſo be events or connexions in nature by which, conſiſtently with perfect wiſdom and goodneſs, the like may happen ſometimes to a *ſpecies*? The enjoyment of whatever is a favour in exiſtence, may be made precarious in any

the caſe of a perſon fallen from honour, eaſe and wealth, to the cares, and toil, and indigence of low life; would it not be true, that the condition of ſuch a perſon was calamitous? But might he not, as many actually are, have been *born* in it, and yet have abundant reaſon to be thankful for exiſtence?

any degree the creator pleaſes, or ſuſpended on any conditions that he ſees to be moſt conductive to the ends of his government. The bleſſings which the Chriſtian ſcheme ſuppoſes mankind had loſt, they never had any right to. The Divine perfections certainly do not require, that ſuch virtue as ours ſhould be rewarded with the *Chriſtian ſalvation.* Had our Maker intended us only for a *temporary exiſtence* we ſhould have had no reaſon for any other ſentiments than grateful ones, provided we enjoyed *any* degree of happineſs, and received univerſally an adequate retribution. But he has been infinitely more kind to us. That very conſtitution of his government which made us liable to be brought into that calamitous ſtate which Chriſtianity ſuppoſes, made proviſions alſo for the poſſibility of our deliverance and reſtoration to the views of a happy eternity; and thus diſplays the higheſt wiſdom and goodneſs we can imagine, agreeably to the obſervations in page 129—132.

But

But it is high time to ſtop. I feel myſelf in danger of going far beyond my depth. The ways and adminiſtration of the Deity muſt be *unfathomable* to us. Were they otherwiſe, they could not be *infinitely* wiſe and good. The origin of evil has been the grand ſubject of enquiry among thoughtful men in all ages, and various have been the ſentiments about it. What has been now ſaid on this point is offered with a deep ſenſe of imperfection and blindneſs. Though it ſeems to remove ſome difficulties, it does not, I am ſenſible, remove all. What has been laſt inſiſted on ſhould be particularly attended to. If, according to the ſcriptures and ancient tradition, our ſtate is indeed a *fallen* ſtate, the direct ſolution of the queſtion concerning the origin of evil would be a recital of the manner in which we were brought into it, or a diſtinct account of thoſe cauſes and events under the Divine government from which it is derived. But ſuch an account, ſuppoſing

ing it given us, we may not perhaps be capable of underſtanding *. We muſt therefore be much in the dark; and while we are ſo, while we ſee nothing but juſt the preſent moment, and know ſo little of the hiſtory of the univerſe, and its connexions and laws, it cannot but be unreaſonable to pretend to be able to form an adequate judgment of our ſtate, or completely to account for every circumſtance in it. Every one who

* The account of the Fall in *Geneſis* is far from being ſuch as account as I here mean. It is, perhaps, in ſome meaſure *veiled*, or at leaſt *partial*, and deſigned only to inform us that, whereas we were at firſt placed higher in the ſcale of being, we were reduced lower and ſunk into our preſent *mortal* ſtate in conſequence of ſome connexions we had with ſuperior orders of creatures, or of the agency of an *evil Being* repreſented by the *Serpent*; a deliverer being at the ſame *time* promiſed, who ſhould *deſtroy the works of the devil*. — See the laſt eſſay in a book entitled, *Crito*, where a good deal that deſerves attention is ſaid by the ingenious and learned author, on the power of ſuperior Beings and the connexions we may have had with them; and alſo, on another ſubject touched in page 140.

who looks about him muſt lament the degeneracy of mankind; and every one who believes the doctrine of religion muſt tremble for the danger he is in, and the multitudes who are likely to be loſt. Inſtead of allowing ourſelves to be very anxious about diſcovering the particular cauſes that brought us into theſe circumſtances, our chief enquiry ſhould be, whether, amidſt all our darkneſs, we do not ſee enough to aſſure us that God is perfectly righteous in all his ways; and about this I can entertain no doubts, for the reaſons I have endeavoured to explain.——But above all things, it is our buſineſs to take care of ourſelves, to keep clear of the *corruption that is in the world through luſt* *, to ſtrive to ſave our own ſouls amidſt the dreadful wreck, and at the ſame time to do all we can to ſave ſome with ourſelves. This is the great uſe which we ſhould make of what we have

* 2 Pet. i. 4.

have reaſon to believe concerning our ſtate; and I wiſh I knew how to impreſs on the mind of the perſon who reads this a due ſenſe of its importance. Without doubt every other object of concern, compared with it, is entirely trivial and inſignificant.

SECT. V.

Of the Uſes of the Doctrine of Providence.

IN the preceeding ſections I have conſidered moſt of the queſtions relating to the doctrine of Providence, which ſeemed to me of great importance. I have endeavoured to give a juſt view of the nature and proofs of it, but have not aimed at diſcuſſing every queſtion that has been ſtarted about it, or inſiſting on every argument that might have been urged. In ſtating, particularly, the evidence for Providence, I have avoided entering into ſome reaſonings which have a great effect on my own mind, becauſe likely to be conſidered as too abſtracted and metaphyſical, and becauſe alſo a full explanation of them could not be properly given in this diſ-

diſſertation *. What has been ſaid, however, will, I hope, be ſufficient to convince ſuch as will impartially attend to it, and nothing

* Of this ſort are the following obſervations, which I will juſt mention here, becauſe it is poſſible that, without any particular explanation, they may appear to a few as important as they do to myſelf.——Since all limitation muſt be an effect of ſome limiting cauſes, it can have no place in an unoriginated nature. Unoriginated power, wiſdom, and goodneſs, therefore, muſt be *infinite*. Wherever infinite *power* is, there muſt be infinite *knowledge*, it being contradictory to ſuppoſe that the power of any intelligent Being can extend further than his ideas. And, ſince the obligations of moral rectitude are founded in eternal truth and reaſon, where there is infinite *knowledge*, there muſt be infinite *goodneſs*. There is, therefore, a neceſſary connexion between infinite power, wiſdom, and goodneſs. They are eſſentially one, and cannot reſide in different natures. The ſovereignty of the univerſe, therefore, muſt be perfectly wiſe and righteous; and all the order and beauty in the creation are to be traced up to one eternal and immutable principle of order and beauty, and of all that is venerable and excellent.——It deſerves particular notice, that the neceſſary connexion which our own ideas teach us, in the manner juſt mentioned, between infinite power, wiſdom and goodneſs, and which certainly is the moſt agreeable and important

nothing now remains but that I repreſent the proper improvement of this ſubject, and conſider the influence which it ought to have on our tempers and lives.

Here, 1ſt. It ſhould be recollected that the argument on which I have principally inſiſted in the laſt ſection, furniſhes us with a ſtrong reaſon for contentment. As this reaſon for contentment cannot be too much inculcated, I ſhall not ſcruple to recall ſome of the obſervations before made, in order to give a more diſtinct and full account of it.

The fact I ſhall go upon is, that happineſs is *prevalent* in human life. This, I know, has been denied by ſome, but certainly without any reaſon. There is, in reality, no compariſon between the *bleſſings*

of all truths, is exhibited to us in all that we ſee of the world; there being no inſtance in which the *power* that made the univerſe has diſplayed deſign, which does not appear to be *wiſe* and *kind* deſign. Compare the note in page 23, 24.

bleſſings and the *calamities* of life, or between the number of hours in which we enjoy ſome kind of pleaſure, and thoſe in which we ſuffer pain. What in ſome meaſure deceives us in this matter is, our conſidering every ſtate in which we are not exempted from *all uneaſineſs*, as a ſtate of abſolute miſery; whereas we may be happy, that is, the *whole* pleaſure of exiſting may not be deſtroyed, under conſiderable degrees of uneaſineſs.—— We are, on the contrary, apt to conſider no ſtate as *happy* which is not attended with ſome ſenſations of poſitive joy; and this is true as this word has been generally uſed, but is far from being ſo if we apply it, as I now do, to any ſtate or circumſtances in which to *be* is better than not to *be*.——Life, though deſtitute of any particular gratifications, is naturally agreeable. Seldom does it happen at the end of a day that we have no reaſon to thank God for it, or that we can ſay with truth, upon reviewing it, that it has been a *miſerable* day to us. A ſtate

of ſome degree of enjoyment, or of exemption from all ſuch diſtreſſes as take away, while they laſt, all comfort, being our uſual ſtate, it is what we look for and reckon upon; and therefore, whatever happens to put us out of this ſtate, or to render exiſtence a real burden, is the more obſerved and makes the deeper impreſſion. And from hence it comes to paſs, that one fit of ſickneſs or diſaſter engages the attention, and furniſhes with matter for converſation for months or years, while all the health and pleaſures with which common life abounds, are overlooked and diſregarded.

Suppoſing it then evident that the portion of good allotted to men exceeds the portion of evil, let us next enquire what reaſon they can have for diſcontent. Happy, in ſome degree, they feel themſelves. If then they are diſſatisfied, it muſt be becauſe they are not *more* happy. But this is perverſeneſs and preſumption; For

if

if this be a juſt reaſon for diſſatisfaction, it is, in the nature of things, impoſſible they ſhould ever be ſatisfied.——A perſon, ſuppoſe, in a low ſtation and narrow circumſtances, finds upon comparing his enjoyments and ſufferings, the former to be greateſt, and his exiſtence, all things conſidered, to be preferable to non-exiſtence. Why then is he not contented?—"Becauſe he is not ſtationed higher in the "world."——Suppoſe this granted him.——Will not the ſame ground of diſcontent ſtill remain? And would it not remain though he was even raiſed to the ſtation of an angel *?——It is plain, therefore,

 that

* No perſon of any reflection can imagine that this argument implies, that we ought not to uſe proper means to improve our circumſtances, or increaſe our happineſs. The moſt vigorous uſe of ſuch means is conſiſtent with the higheſt degree of ſubmiſſion to the Divine will, nay, is *required* by it. Whatever happineſs lies within the reach of the powers given us and we can innocently obtain, ought to be conſidered as a part of the happineſs intended us by Providence: and it would be, not acquieſcing in its diſpoſals but thwarting them, to deprive ourſelves of it by inactivity and negligence.

that nothing can be more abſurd than diſcontent. It goes upon a principle which would level the whole univerſe, and ſow uneaſineſs among all the inferior orders of Beings. The true language of it is; "I "will be at the top of the creation. I will "accept of no happineſs ſhort of the great-"eſt that can be communicated."—What can equal the arrogance of ſuch a diſpoſition of mind? How entirely does it unfit for exiſtence under God's government, where there muſt be ſubordinations and diſtinctions of all ſorts and degrees? How baſe is it to complain of that Being who has given us all we enjoy, merely becauſe he has not given us *more*, when, without wrong, he might have given us *nothing*? It becomes not thoſe who are obliged for every degree of good to pure favour, to preſcribe how much they ſhall have; or for thoſe who might never have exiſted, to determine how perfect and happy they ſhall be.—We need not doubt but that it is for the beſt reaſons, that our ſtate is ſuch as we find it. Our duty is to accept

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humbly that portion of bliſs which falls to our ſhare, to acquieſce carefully in our different ſtations, and to eſteem every little which may be granted us a kindneſs that calls for gratitude. Thus ſhall we make the moſt of what we enjoy, act ſuitably to the relation of creatures, recommend ourſelves to our all-wiſe Governor, and take the certain method to ſecure further favour *.

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* Vide Sen. De Beneficiis. Lib. II. Cap. 27. &c. *Non patitur aviditas quemquam eſſe gratum: nunquam enim improbæ ſpei quod datur ſatis eſt. Eo majora cupimus, quo majora venerunt—Nemo agit de tribunatu gratias. Sed queritur quod non eſt ad præturam uſque perductus. Nec hæc grata eſt ſi deeſt conſulatus. Ne hic quidem ſatiat ſi unus eſt... Ultra ſe cupiditas porrigit, et felicitatem ſuam non intelligit; quia non unde venerit reſpicit, ſed quo tendat——Quærendo non efficiam, ut majoribus dignus ſim, ſed ut datis indignus.*——What follows in Cap. 29. I ſhall give as tranſlated by an ingenious friend.—"Why do you complain of your "condition as a man? You do not judge of the gifts "of God with equity. You find perfections in other "Beings that you have not in yourſelf. You make "compariſons and deſpiſe your own lot: So you "create

It will not be improper to obſerve here, that though I have argued on the ſuppoſition that happineſs is prevalent in human life, yet we ſhould, in reality, have no good reaſon for complaint, tho' the contrary were true, provided it was the effect of

"create uneaſineſs to yourſelf, becauſe while you "muſe on what you have not, you overlook what "you have; and accordingly you neither enjoy it as "you might, nor value it as you ſhould. Surely, "it would be more *wiſe* as well as more *pious*, to "think of the advantages you have received, and to "acknowledge them with thankfulneſs; to remember "that as a *man*, you have the chief place in this fair "and beautiful world, and that God hath made *us* "*men* maſters of all worldly things. You therefore, "who undervalue the gifts of God to man, reflect on "the privileges *we men* have received from him. "The ſtrength which is above our own we have "means to ſubdue. The ſwiftneſs we cannot over-"take, we have other ways to overcome. What we "want in one reſpect is ſupplied in another. We "have a *ſoul* within us which is more than an equi-"valent for all other gifts. Look round then, and "if thou canſt not find any other creature which "thou hadſt rather be than what thou art, be thank-"ful for thy condition, and confeſs that God, in "very deed, hath been good to thee."

of our own ill conduct. From this source, undoubtedly, proceed our worſt evils. Human life, as it is the gift of God, or as we might make it by behaving ſuitably to his intentions and ſtudying to maintain tranquillity, is an unſpeakably greater bleſſing than we commonly find it.——This obſervation places the abſurdity of diſcontent in a light that cannot but impreſs every ingenuous mind. Is it not ſhameful to murmur on account of evils which we voluntarily bring upon ourſelves, contrary to plain admonitions and warnings? Does it not infinitely more become guilty Beings who are ſo much the creators of their own ſufferings, to accuſe and reproach *themſelves*, than to exclaim againſt *Providence?*

I cannot quit theſe reflections without adding, that the ſame argument with that now uſed to ſhew the folly of diſcontent in general, may be employed to ſhew the folly, in particular, of the inclination which many perſons diſcover to complain, becauſe greater light and evidence

evidence on ſeveral ſpeculative points have not been granted them. Every man has light enough to act upon, and to direct him in his moſt important concerns. This is all we can have any *right* to expect; and to indulge diſcontent becauſe we have not ſo much as we wiſh for, or as is neceſſary to ſatisfy curioſity, would be tacitly to aſſert that we have a right to be omniſcient.——It is indeed our duty to ſtrive to obtain all the light poſſible; but at the ſame time we ſhould remember, that it is no ſmall part of virtue to acquieſce in that degree of light allotted us by Providence, or which we are able to acquire in the faithful uſe of our faculties.—But to diſmiſs this ſubject.

I would further obſerve with reſpect to the proper improvement of the doctrine of Providence, that it ought to be always attended to and recognized by us. The care of the Deity, we have ſeen, extends to all events. Nothing happens without either his appointment or permiſſion. It muſt be

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our duty to remember this, and to maintain a deep ſenſe of it in our hearts. Nothing can be more reaſonable than that we ſhould look up continually to the Sovereign Arbiter of nature, expect ſucceſs in our undertakings from him, and acknowledge him in all our ways. There is within us an unhappy proneneſs to ſink into an inſenſibility with reſpect to him, and it is remarkable that the chief cauſe of this is the peculiar degree of our dependence upon him, and his being ſo much one with our ſouls that we overlook him. There is nothing ſo near us, and therefore, there is nothing that we are ſo apt to diſregard. He is in every breath we draw and in every thought we think, and for this reaſon he engages not our attention; and, becauſe *every thing*, he becomes *nothing* to us.—Thus, in particular, his power is as much diſplayed in thoſe events which are moſt common, as in thoſe which are moſt extraordinary. But in the former we ſeldom take notice of it, whereas in the latter it alarms and terrifies us. Were the bodies on the

ſurface of the earth to aſcend into the air, or were the planets to fly out of their orbits, our thoughts would be immediately drawn to God's hand; but it affects us not in caſes where there is much more reaſon to acknowledge it, in the tendency of bodies downwards, and the regular motions of the heavenly bodies. What comes to paſs out of the uſual courſe we are never backward to aſcribe to him; but what is done conſtantly and regularly, we are ready to conſider as coming to paſs of itſelf, and requiring no cauſe. We ſhould endeavour to guard our minds againſt this weakneſs, and ſtudy to acquire a habit of carrying up our views to God on all occaſions. We may be ſure of being right in doing this. The courſe of nature is nothing but his power exerting itſelf every where, according to fixt rules, in order to anſwer the beſt ends. The frame of the world muſt be in every reſpect what he has been pleaſed to ordain. By him it ſubſiſts, and *in him we live, and move, and have our being* *. See Sect. II. page 41—54.

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* Acts xvii. 28.

One cannot think, without concern and ſurpriſe, of the inexcuſable degree in which ſome perſons are guilty of that diſregard to Providence, on which I am now remarking. They terminate their views in the objects of ſenſe, and forget all ſuperior and inviſible power. They conſider the Deity as either withdrawn from the world to enjoy repoſe in the extramundane ſpaces; or, if neceſſarily preſent to it, as an idle and vain-glorious Being, who is above concerning himſelf with any thing in it. They look no higher for the ſource of any evils they ſuffer, or bleſſings they enjoy, than *chance* or *fortune*, or *fate*, and they are generally very well ſatisfied if they can point out the *immediate* cauſe of an effect without enquiring any further. This has been too true of even ſome who have been diſtinguiſhed by the name of *Philoſophers*. But it is impoſſible that they ſhould have any juſt title to that character. It has appeared, I believe, that ſuch a way of thinking is no leſs repugnant to true philoſophy, than it is miſerably

gloomy and diſcouraging *.——It is worth remembering, particularly, that the diſpoſition to be ſatisfied with diſcovering the *immediate* cauſes of effects in natural philoſophy, without carrying our views higher, argues exactly the ſame folly with that of a perſon, who ſhould imagine that he had ſufficiently accounted for the motion of a particular wheel in a machine, by ſhewing that it

* "A little philoſophy inclineth mens minds to "*atheiſm*; but depth in philoſophy bringeth mens "minds about to *religion*." *Lord Bacon's Eſſay on Atheiſm.*

"In the entrance of philoſophy, when the ſecond "cauſes moſt obvious to the ſenſes offer themſelves "to the mind, we are apt to cleave to them, and "dwell too much upon them, ſo as to forget what "is ſuperior in nature. But when we paſs further, "and behold the dependency, continuation, and "confederacy of cauſes, and the works of Provi-"dence, then according to the allegory of the "poets, we eaſily believe that the higheſt link of "nature's chain muſt needs be tied to the foot of "Jupiter's chair; or perceive that philoſophy, like "Jacob's viſion, diſcovers to us a ladder whoſe top "reaches up to the footſtool of the throne of God." *Mr. Maclaurin's Account of Sir Iſaac Newton's Philoſophical Diſcoveries*, Book I. Chap. 3.

it was turned by the wheel next to it, without extending his views to the ſkill of the artiſt, and to the ſpring, on whoſe conſtant action all the motions of the machine depended; or rather it argues the ſame folly with that of the *Indian* mentioned by Mr. *Locke*, who ſatisfied himſelf with thinking that the world was ſupported by an elephant, and the elephant by a tortoiſe.—It ſhould, however, be obſerved here, that there is an extreme on the other ſide, which ought carefully to be avoided. I mean, the extreme into which thoſe perſons run who have recourſe *immediately* to Divine power, in order to account for *every* event, and who are apt to look with horror on all attempts to aſſign the natural cauſes of events. The former extreme is *atheiſm*. This is *ſuperſtition*; and both argue great ſhortſightedneſs and ignorance. But the laſt is perhaps the moſt excuſable. We cannot ſay how far the dependence of lower cauſes on more general ones reaches, or how complicated the mechaniſm of nature may be; but we know that the Maker's agency is the

primary cauſe which eſtabliſhed all others, and to which all others owe their force; and this proves, that there is a juſt ſenſe in which we may aſcribe to him every effect in the material world, and conſider all that happens as the reſult of his will.

Thirdly. From the account that has been given of Providence we may learn the reaſonableneſs of Prayer. Were it true that the Deity does not attend to our affairs, or that the ſeries of events goes on in one immutable direction independently of him, no help could be expected from him; nor could we be at all the better for any application of our minds to him, and therefore prayer would be an abſurdity. But it has been ſhewn that the contrary is true. If I have argued right, the ſeries of events is juſt what he ſees fit to appoint or allow. He is intimately preſent with us every moment, obſerving all our thoughts, and diſpoſing all the circumſtances of our exiſtence. The whole world is in his hand, and by an imperceptible direction of the operations of natural cauſes and of the thoughts

thoughts of mankind, he can over-rule whatever comes to paſs, and grant proper anſwers to prayer.—The objection then againſt prayer, taken from the ſuppoſed unalterableneſs of the courſe of things, and the impoſſibility of deriving any benefit from it, conſiſtently with the ſettled order of the world, is groundleſs.——If there is an all-directing Providence, nothing can be more fit than to endeavour to engage it in our favour. If we owe our whole happineſs to God, and the entire fate of our Beings is determined by his will, it muſt be inexcuſable not to acknowledge and worſhip him. If he governs all created exiſtence, and nothing can come to paſs contrary to his counſels, it is reaſonable to ſeek his protection, to fly to him in danger, to beg his aid in accompliſhing our good deſigns, to implore his bleſſing on our enjoyments and to recommend to his care thoſe who are dear to us. Nor can any perſon, who has his mind duly impreſſed with a ſenſe of the abſolute dependence of all things on the Deity, omit theſe acts without offering

great violence to himſelf.—The belief of an omnipreſent Deity prompts the human heart, with a force almoſt irreſiſtible, to direct its deſires to him. This tendency diſcovers itſelf in all mankind; and as far as it operates, it implies a neceſſity of conſidering prayer as likely to be of avail to procure bleſſings for us. It may be well preſumed that this ſentiment of nature muſt be right; and that the Deity does indeed either by himſelf or ſome intermediate agency, follow prayer with ſuch bleſſings as it may be a juſt reaſon for communicating. Experience and obſervation prove nothing to the contrary. For, ſuppoſing the conſtitution of the world to be ſuch as eſtabliſhes an availableneſs in prayer, it muſt be impoſſible to diſtinguiſh the bleſſings which have this ſource from others. It is enough that we have reaſon to conclude that God is a friend to the pious and worthy, and that we ſee in general their ſtate to be happier than that of the irreligious and vicious.——The opinion that the Deity has limited himſelf to a ſettled courſe of acting, or to general

laws from which he never deviates, has very little to do with this point. For let it be allowed to be true; Is it likewiſe true of all thoſe ſubordinate Beings, who may be the miniſters of his Providence? May it not be itſelf a *law* of his government, or one part of his ſettled courſe of acting, to make a proper difference between thoſe who acknowledge his ſupreme dominion by praying to him, and thoſe who do not?—But what is it informs us that the Deity never acts but by general laws? The reaſon I have mentioned more than once * for the eſtabliſhment of general laws is far from being any juſt foundation for this opinion. Particular influences accommodated to particular occaſions, though ſuppoſed not reducible to any general laws, may yet be agreeable to them, and entirely conſiſtent with their inviolableneſs; as is ſhewn in the firſt and third ſections.

It is neceſſary to add, that were there in truth, on account of the unalterableneſs of

* See page 16.

the courſe of nature and the impropriety of adventitious influences, no benefit to be derived from ſupplications of the Deity, an inconſiſtency would be eſtabliſhed in the conſtitution of the world; for by the frame of our minds it would *dictate* prayer to us, at the ſame time that by fixing its unavailableneſs it had rendered it vain and impertinent. But this ſubject will come to be more amply diſcuſſed in the next Diſſertation.

In the next place. God's Providence is the proper object of abſolute confidence. We ought to truſt in it with firmneſs, and to throw upon it all our cares. The belief of it ſhould render us ſerene in all ſeaſons, and ſupport and encourage us in the worſt extremities. It is impoſſible that any event in which our intereſt is concerned ſhould be neglected. We are under the protection of infinite power, and the charge of ſovereign goodneſs. No perplexing fears, therefore, or deſponding ſolicitude ſhould at any time enter into

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our breaſts.—One truth, however, let us carefully attend to. Let us remember that our truſt in God's Providence ought to be regulated by a regard to the ſpotleſs purity of his character, and accompanied always with the practice of virtue, and our own utmoſt prudence and diligence. Without this our expectations from Providence are vain, and our truſt in it will be preſumption. What it is chiefly employed in is the adjuſtment of events to the different characters of moral agents. God is a *righteous* Being, and he can favour none but the *righteous*. If we are not of this number we have nothing to expect from him. His government, which ſhould be the *joy* of the whole creation, ought to be a *terror* to us; and it will be a neceſſary inſtance of its perfect rectitude to conſign us over to puniſhment. It would be diſhonourable to him to exerciſe goodneſs towards thoſe who abuſe his goodneſs and are nuiſances in his works. It is not fit that rational agents ſhould be made happy without their own active concurrence, and virtuous induſtry. But

theſe ſuppoſed there is nothing that ſhould diſturb us, nor is it poſſible that we ſhould expect too much from the bounty of our Maker. After diſcharging our duty and making the beſt uſe we can of the powers given us, we have nothing to do but to truſt our concerns with the Deity, to commit to him our whole exiſtence, and wait quietly for the iſſue of preſent events, which will prove glorious beyond conception to every true friend of righteouſneſs.

In connexion with this it muſt be obſerved that the doctrine of Providence is a ſource of the higheſt joy.—Were events under no good direction; did blind neceſſity or fickle chance govern the world, our condition would indeed be deplorable. We could look at nothing with any complacency. All nature would loſe its beauty, and appear dark and deſolate. But this is by no means our ſtate. The order of nature is wiſe and good beyond all that we can aſk or think. Almighty power, it has been ſhewn, united to perfect

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wiſdom and benevolence, is at the head of the univerſe actuating all its parts, and preſiding over all its events. What ſeems moſt formidable, therefore may ſit eaſy on our minds, and infinitely more may be expected to take place in nature than the moſt benevolent heart can imagine. —How delightful are theſe truths? With what exultation and triumph ſhould they fill us?——Do you ſuffer under any calamity?——Remember that the eye of the Deity is upon you, and that you can ſuffer nothing but in conſequence of the diſpoſals and counſels of his ever attentive and unerring Providence. Accept then your ſufferings with a zeal becoming his faithful ſubject. Submit to them with loyal and hearty affection, and never indulge a repining thought. Wherein can your dignity conſiſt except in having one will with God? Can you be diſpleaſed with what is *right*? Would you have the world governed *wrong*?—No degree of *improper* pain, no ſufferings inconſiſtent with a perfect order of adminiſtration

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can ever find admiſſion into the world. Our affairs, and thoſe of our friends and of all our fellow-creatures, are, in every particular, under the management of everlaſting and omnipotent reaſon and love.——Is not this what every heart muſt wiſh for? Is there any thing that we can poſſibly deſire beyond it? What ſatisfaction ſhould we feel in exiſtence, to find ourſelves in a ſcene ſo glorious, in circumſtances ſo happy?——Did the univerſal order require us to ſacrifice to it every advantage of exiſtence, or were the ſubordinations eſtabliſhed in the creation for producing the greateſt good ſuch as obliged us to give up all our happineſs; though, in theſe circumſtances, ſuch a fealty of heart to the government of the univerſe as would cauſe us to *rejoice* is not perhaps attainable; yet, if duly prevalent, it would certainly produce perfect *acquieſcence*. But this is a ſuppoſition that we have no reaſon for making. No ſuch trial is put upon us. Our circumſtances are infinitely happier. The univer-

universal order has already brought us much happiness; and we are assured that, if we avoid vice and discharge our duty, our happiness shall not cease at death, but be renewed in brighter regions, and there go on increasing and improving to all eternity.—Oh! ravishing hope.—Glory for ever be to that inconceivable grace which thus blesses us *.

Once more. I cannot help observing that the account which the scriptures give of the doctrine of Providence leads us to believe their heavenly original. It is not possible to consider, without admiration, the elevated descriptions which they give of God as presiding over the world, producing all the revolutions in it, and *working*

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* *The wages of sin is death. But the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.* Rom. vi. 23. *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to his abundant mercy, has begotten us again to a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us,* 1 Pet. i. 3, 4.

*all things after the counsel of his own will**. The whole history they contain is one uniform display of the Divine superintendency of our affairs.—It is an observation no less just than common, that there is this remarkable difference between the sacred history and all others; that whereas other histories seldom go higher than the passions of men and the powers of nature for the sources of the events they relate, this always carries our thoughts up to the *first* cause, and directs our views to God as the guide and governor of whatever happens. Thus; *of the sword or a famine, or a pestilence, it says that God sent it* †; *of every calamity in a city, that he does it*; *of the wind and the lightening, that they go forth at his word*; *of the rain, that he gives it*; *of the falling of a sparrow to the ground, that it happens not without him*; of what seems most casual, that he directs it, and of *the hairs*

* Eph. i. 11.

† Is. xlv. 7. — Amos iii. 6. — Psal. cxlviii. — Prov. xvi. 33. — Matt. x. 29, 30. — Rom. xi. 36.

hairs of our head, that they are all numbered.——Such repreſentations of Divine Providence, ſo agreeable to our beſt notions, and exceeding all that can be found in other writings, afford an internal evidence of conſiderable importance in favour of the ſcriptures.

But further. As the doctrine of Providence, ſuppoſed previouſly eſtabliſhed, furniſhes us with an argument for the ſcriptures, ſo theſe in their turn furniſh us with an argument for Providence.——We ſee here that we have connexions with an inviſible world of ſpirits, that there have been interpoſitions of ſuperior power in our affairs, and that heaven does intereſt itſelf about us particularly and wonderfully.—But what I have now chiefly in view is, the argument for Providence ariſing from the completion of the ſcripture propheſies. There are in the Old and New Teſtament, many predictions of events very diſtant from the times when they were delivered, which

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are repreſented as ſure to be verified by Divine Providence. The accompliſhment of ſuch predictions, when it happens, proves that the predicted events were indeed ſubject to the ſuperintendency of Providence, and obliges us to conclude the ſame concerning all events. When we find, for inſtance, that the preſent ſtate of the Jews and the corruption of chriſtianity by popery were foretold, and the principal circumſtances attending them deſcribed, ſome thouſands of years ago, we cannot doubt but theſe events have been all along objects of the attention of the Deity, and happen only in conſequence of his unſearchable counſels.——It is worthy of ſpecial notice, that the repreſentation made in theſe prophecies of the *ſpotleſs* * *holineſs* of the Deity as his moſt diſtinguiſhing attribute, and the chief ſpring of his actions in guiding events, proves further that the adminiſtration of the world is holy and righteous.——In ſhort. The Bible gives us

* Rev. iv. 8.—xv. 4.

us a hiſtory of all the great facts in which this earth is concerned from its creation to its diſſolution. A conſiderable part of this hiſtory muſt be *prophetical*, and what we have ſeen verified of this part demonſtrates that the writings containing it come from the author and ruler of nature. It likewiſe proves that the world is under a moral government, and that Divine Providence watches over it thro' every period of its duration. And, perhaps, the prophecies which ſtill remain to be accompliſhed may ſome time or other afford a demonſtration of theſe truths that will put to flight all infidelity, and convince and ſurpriſe the whole world.

It ought not to be forgotten on this occaſion that there is one event, important above all others, which the ſacred writings foretel, and to which, they acquaint us, every preſent diſpenſation of Providence refers. I mean the LAST JUDGMENT; when, we are told, every one *ſhall receive according to his works*,

and the Divine moral government with reſpect to the human race ſhall be conſummated; when the *earth with all her works ſhall be burnt up, the Son of man appear in power and great glory, and all that are in their graves ſhall hear his voice, and ſhall come forth, they that have done good to the reſurrection of life, and they that have done evil to the reſurrection of damnation.* What we have ſeen verified of the ſcripture prophecies *aſſures* us that ſuch a time is coming; and happy are thoſe who are always thinking of it, and preparing for it.

To conclude the whole. —— Let us labour earneſtly to bring our minds into that temper which the doctrine of Providence requires. Let us follow implicitly wherever it leads us, and make an abſolute ſurrender of our wills to God's will, ſuppreſſing all ſollicitude about every thing but acting faithfully the part he has aſſigned us, maintaining inviolably our allegiance to his government, and never

never wiſhing to enjoy any advantage which he is pleaſed to deny, or to be exempted from any troubles which he can permit to come upon us.—Thus ſhall we be eaſed of all unneceſſary cares, enjoy that *peace of God which paſſeth all underſtanding*, and attain to the higheſt dignity and bliſs of which rational Beings are capable.——Oh! joyful reflection! God reigns, and all is well. Eternal wiſdom and benevolence are preſent every where, and govern all things. Welcome then every event. Welcome diſappointment, ſickneſs or death. Let tempeſts roar. Let thunder tear the heavens, or earthquakes overturn cities and kingdoms. In all we may hear the voice of the preſiding divinity aſſuring us that we need not fear. Within the embraces of his arms we muſt be always ſafe.——— *Rejoice in the Lord all the earth. Say among the heathen that the Lord reigneth. Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad. Let the ſea roar, and the floods*

clap their hands. *.——*Praiſe him all ye his angels. Praiſe him ſun and moon. Praiſe him ye ſtars of light. Praiſe him ye dragons and all deeps. Fire and hail, ſnow and vapor, mountains and fields, beaſts and all cattle, creeping things and flying fowls, kings of the earth and all people; Praiſe the name of the Lord, for his name alone is excellent.*——Let the whole creation join in raiſing one ſong of praiſe to him.——*Praiſe the Lord, O my ſoul.*

* Pſal. xcvi. cxlviii. ciii.

DISSERTATION II.

ON

PRAYER.

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SECTION I.

The Nature, Reaſonableneſs, and Efficacy of Prayer explained, and the Objections to it anſwered.

HAVING in the foregoing diſſertation endeavoured to explain and defend the doctrine of *Providence*, I ſhall now proceed to treat of the duty of *Prayer*. There is no religious duty againſt which more objections have been made. It will, therefore, be neceſſary to begin this diſſertation with ſtating particularly its nature and reaſonableneſs. After which, I ſhall give an

account of the manner in which it ought to be performed, in order to render it acceptable and ſucceſsful. Theſe are the two heads under which I ſhall throw what I intend to ſay on the ſubject now before me.

By *Prayer*, I mean a ſerious and ſolemn addreſs of our minds to the Deity, as the fountain of being and happineſs, and the parent and governor of the world. It has been divided into ſeveral diſtinct parts according to the ſeveral acts of our minds when engaged in it. The chief of theſe parts are the four following. Acknowledgement of our dependence, and of the Divine perfections and ſovereignty. Thankfulneſs for the mercies we have received. A penitential confeſſion of what we have done amiſs; and offering up our deſires of favour and happineſs for ourſelves and others.

Nothing is plainer than that the firſt of theſe is reaſonable. Abſolute per-

perfection of nature and character, and complete excellence, muſt be the propereſt objects of acknowledgement and eſteem. Worſhip and adoration muſt be due to the Being who made us, and who poſſeſſes infinite power, wiſdom, and goodneſs. He who is ſupreme over all beings ought to receive the homage of all.

The obligation to the next part of prayer, or thankſgiving for the mercies we enjoy, is as evident as the obligation to gratitude in general. There is no clearer principle of reaſon, than that thankfulneſs is due for benefits received; and if that perſon acts wrong, who is not not grateful to *human* benefactors, or who does not ſtudy in a proper manner to teſtify his gratitude, it is not poſſible that he can be innocent who is void of gratitude to the *Deity*; or who neglects to offer up thankful acknowledgements to the Being to whom he owes all he *is*, all he *has*, and all he *hopes for*.

The propriety alſo of the third part of prayer, or of a penitential confeſſion of our guilt, is very obvious.——As far, therefore, as theſe conſtitute Prayer there ſeems no room for queſtioning its reaſonableneſs: And it ſhould be remembered that in reality they are very important parts of Prayer.

It will, however, be objected probably by ſome, that all that ſeems neceſſary in theſe inſtances is a ſenſe of the Divine goodneſs, and of our dependent and guilty ſtate; and that where this ſenſe and the proper reverent, grateful, and penitent diſpoſitions are found, there can be no occaſion for what is meant by Prayer.

I anſwer; that it is plainly proper not only that we ſhould poſſeſs theſe *diſpoſitions*, but that they ſhould be drawn forth into *exerciſe*, and *expreſſed* by *particular acts* before the Deity. Good diſpoſitions, when not attended with the acts

acts which are the proper expreſſions of them, muſt be defective. Gratitude and repentance leads us in all caſes to grateful and penitential acknowledgments. When in their due ſtrength, they always produce theſe; and it is plainly fit they ſhould.—It is incumbent upon us to teſtify our regards to the Deity in the beſt manner we can; but it would be abſurd in any perſon to pretend he does this, who reſts in contemplation, and avoids all direct praiſe and worſhip.

The laſt part of Prayer I mentioned was offering up our deſires of favour and happineſs for ourſelves and others. This is what is moſt properly ſtiled *Prayer*; and it is what has been moſt objected to, and what therefore ſhall be now particularly examined. The difficulties which have been raiſed about it, would, I believe, have been little regarded had more attention been given to the native and uncorrupted dictates of the

the human mind on this ſubject. What is evident, if it be not ſo, that what we want from God, it is fit we ſhould humbly implore from him? What common and unperverted underſtanding can doubt, whether there is a propriety in aſking for the bleſſings and benefits which we muſt owe to his bounty? Is it poſſible that if we neglected this, it ſhould be equally fit that we ſhould be made happy by him? Who can help ſeeing that devout ſupplicants are more proper objects of favour than thoſe who never pray, though it ſhould be ſuppoſed poſſible, that, in other reſpects, their qualifications may be alike?——In ſhort; the act of addreſſing our deſires to God for the benefits which are neceſſary to our happineſs, implies in it that ſenſe of our dependance upon him, and that acknowledgment of his dominion which render it ſelf-evidently proper. The fitneſs of it is immediately perceived by the loweſt as well as the higheſt underſtanding; and the force of nature and reaſon will

extort

extort it from every mind that poſſeſſes a juſt ſenſe of piety.

But let us attend to the objections that have been urged.

In the firſt place; it has been ſaid, "that there can be no reaſon for Prayer, "becauſe God, being *omniſcient*, needs "not to be informed of our wants; "and being *unchangeable*, none of our "ſupplications can be the means of "making any alteration in him, or of "obtaining from him any benefits."

Before I conſider this and the other objections commonly inſiſted on againſt Prayer, I muſt beg leave to recommend to particular notice, that I aſſert that there is an *immediate* propriety or fitneſs in ſupplicating the Deity for the bleſſings we want. For the truth of this I appeal to every man's conſcience. No words can make it plainer than it muſt appear by its own light.——Now the

the deſign of all juſt objections againſt Prayer ought to be, to ſhew that there is indeed no ſuch *immediate* propriety in the act of ſupplication; nor can any objections which have not this tendency, or which *ſuppoſe* that there is no ſuch propriety, be of the leaſt conſequence.

Keeping this then in remembrance, let us conſider the objection juſt mentioned.——The firſt part of it, or the aſſertion, that God, being omniſcient, needs not to be informed of our wants, is entirely impertinent. For no one ever ſaid that the deſign of Prayer was to inform the Deity of what he did not know. The plain deſign of it is, to *obtain* for ourſelves the bleſſings we pray for. This is what every one muſt mean whenever he prays. It is implied in the very idea of the action, that we may think it has a tendency to procure for us what we ſupplicate. This tendency is founded on the *propriety* which I have ſaid there is in aſking for the benefits we want. Hence aſking

aſking becomes a *means* of having, and is univerſally ſo conſidered.—In other words; aſking, in a proper manner, for bleſſings from God has a tendency to procure them for us, becauſe it is doing what is fit to be done, and what, therefore, God cannot but expect and require us to do as a *condition* of our having them.

Let us now conſider what regard is due to what is ſaid in oppoſition to this in the latter part of the objection.——— "God, it is ſaid, is unchangeable; and, "therefore, no prayers can be the means "of making any alteration in him, or "of cauſing him to beſtow any bleſſings, "which he would not have beſtowed "without them."———I anſwer; it is true, indeed, that our prayers can make no alteration in the Deity; that is, in his *nature*, *character*, or *diſpoſitions*. But they may make an alteration in the *external effects* of his agency, or in his manner of treating us. Nay, they *muſt* make ſuch an alteration if they at all alter

alter our qualifications; or if offering them up is the performance of a duty, or doing what is proper to be done.—— The diſtinction between the perfections of God conſidered as principles or diſpoſitions in his nature, and the exerciſe of them in a courſe of outward actions, tho' an obvious and uſeful diſtinction, many ſeem entirely to forget. An aſſertion may be very juſt when underſtood of the latter of theſe, which would be very wrong when underſtood of the former.—— Thus, in the preſent caſe, though it would be improper to ſay, that God may be rendered more propitious or favourable in *diſpoſition* to his creatures by any thing they can do; yet, ſurely, he may be rendered more propitious or favourable *in act* to them. That is; their actions may be the means of many effects of his favour to them. They may avert the conſequences of his diſpleaſure, and procure bleſſings for them which they would otherwiſe never have had.

It is worth adding, that as we may thus by our actions obtain bleſſings for *ourſelves* from the Deity, conſiſtently with his immutability; ſo, likewiſe, may we for *others*. Or, what ſome Beings do for their fellow-beings, their benevolence, labours, and virtue may influence, though not properly the Divine perfections, yet the *exerciſe* of them. They may ſupply reaſons to infinite wiſdom for favouring others, and obtain effects of Divine goodneſs for them which they might elſe have wanted.———But to return. If it be really proper that we ſhould humbly apply to God for the mercies we need from him, it muſt be alſo proper that a regard ſhould be paid to ſuch applications, and that there ſhould be a different treatment of thoſe who make them and thoſe who do not; and it muſt be exceeding frivolous to object, that this would imply changeableneſs, in the Deity. God's unchangeableneſs, when conſidered in relation to the exertion of his attributes in the government

of

of the world, conſiſts, certainly, not in always acting in the ſame manner however caſes and circumſtances alter; but in always doing what is right, and varying his conduct according to the various actions, characters, and diſpoſitions of Beings. If then prayer makes an alteration in the caſe of the ſupplicant, as being the diſcharge of an indiſpenſible duty; what would, in truth, infer changeableneſs in him, would be, not his regarding and anſwering it, but his *not* doing this.

Hence, it is eaſy to ſee that the notice which God may be pleaſed to take of our prayers by granting us bleſſings in anſwer to them, is not to be conſidered as an *yielding* to *importunity*, but as *one inſtance* of his acting agreeably to reaſon, or his ſuiting his dealings with us to our conduct. Nor does it imply that he is *backward* to do us good, and, therefore, wants to be *ſollicited* to it. This is no more implied in the caſe of Prayer, than

in that of repentance, or any other inſtance of good conduct, when conſidered as obtaining for us bleſſings and favour. God is always ready to do us all poſſible good; but there are certain conditions on the performance of which the effects of his goodneſs to us are ſuſpended. There is ſomething to be done by us before we can be proper objects of his favour; or before it can be fit for him and conſiſtent with the meaſures of his government to grant us particular benefits. We have a part to act, and duties to diſcharge, which, if neglected, cannot but deprive us of his protection, and leave us deſtitute and unhappy.

But I have, perhaps, beſtowed too much time on this objection.——Let us then proceed to another on which great ſtreſs has been laid. "Before we pray "we are either worthy to receive what "we pray for, or we are not. If we "are *worthy*, it is needleſs to pray becauſe "we ſhall have what is proper to be

" given us, whether we pray for it or not.
" If we are *unworthy*, no prayers can be
" of any avail."

The weakneſs of this objection will be obvious to any one who will apply it to a parallel caſe, and ſuppoſe it urged againſt repentance, or any other duty, when conſidered as a means of procuring bleſſings for us. " Before we repent (it " might be ſaid) it is either fit we " ſhould receive bleſſings from the Deity, " or it is not. If it is fit, we ſhall re- " ceive them, whether we repent or " not; for God wants nothing to engage " him to do what is fit. If it is not fit, " our repentance can be of no avail."— Every one will acknowledge the intolerable abſurdity of ſuch a way of arguing againſt repentance, and ſee that the full anſwer to it is, that *before* repentance it may be unfit that we ſhould be favoured by the Deity, but that it may become fit *upon* repentance.——In like manner, the full anſwer to the preſent

ſent objection againſt Prayer is, that *before* Prayer we may be unworthy, and that Prayer may be the very thing that makes us worthy. *Before* we pray it may be unfit to beſtow particular bleſſings upon us, and it may be *therefore* fit to beſtow them becauſe we pray for them. That this is true is undeniable, if there is an immediate rectitude in aſking for bleſſings from the Deity; for hence, as was before obſerved, it becomes itſelf *one condition* of having, *one* circumſtance in our characters that contributes to render us proper objects of favour, or *one* part of conduct which cannot be neglected without neglecting what is reaſonable, without neglecting virtue and duty, and *ſo far* diſqualifying ourſelves for receiving bleſſings.——Suppoſe two perſons, in other reſpects of like qualifications, one of whom makes conſcience of frequently and ſeriouſly addreſſing his wiſhes to the Deity for mercy and happineſs. The other entirely omits this, and never puts up any ſupplications to him. Is it likely that both theſe perſons

will be treated alike? Does not the one *do right*, and the other *do wrong?* Does not the one act as becomes a dependent Being, and the other as if he was independent? May not the prayers of the one, as being in themſelves reaſonable acts and proper acknowledgements of dependence and indigence, be efficacious towards procuring for him ſome effects of *particular* favour?——On the whole; how evident is it that this objection, like the former, does not *prove* but *ſuppoſe* that Prayer is not reaſonable?

It has been further objected, that meditation alone may anſwer all the purpoſes of Prayer, by fixing in our minds all thoſe good ſentiments which are expreſſed by it; and that therefore it cannot be a neceſſary duty.

As a reply to this it might be ſaid, that meditation alone cannot ſo well and ſo effectually anſwer this end. But the moſt proper reply is, that it goes on the

the falſe ſuppoſition that Prayer is reaſonable only on account of the good effects produced by it in our minds. There is beſides, I have ſaid, an *immediate propriety* in it. It is *in itſelf* a duty, like gratitude or veracity, independently of its conſequences. It is not only an *expreſſion* or *declaration* of good ſentiments, but the *immediate exerciſe* of them in direct and explicit acts.

But ſtill it may be pleaded, "that the "diſpoſitions or ſentiments from which "Prayer ſhould proceed are, in ſtrict-"neſs, all that can be neceſſary; and "that it is very unlikely that, while "deeply ſenſible of our need of mercy "from God and our dependence upon "him, and poſſeſſing the moſt fervent "deſires of his favour and the moſt "humble and pious diſpoſitions, we "ſhould ſuffer merely on account of "our omitting all formal ſupplications, "which, when conſidered as directed "to a Being who perfectly knows our

" deſires, and who wants nothing to " engage him to fulfil them as far as " is proper, look more like ceremo- " nious impertinences than acts of real " duty."

What is ſuggeſted in the latter part of this objection has been conſidered before. One can really ſcarce think it poſſible for an unprejudiced underſtanding ſeriouſly to determine, that addreſſing our deſires of good to an omnipreſent Deity, or ſupplicating him for benefits, is an *impertinence*, and not a *reaſonable* and *proper act*.——With reſpect to the former part of the objection, it is enough to ſay, that deſires and ſentiments are far from being *alone* ſufficient in any caſe. It is the *acts* in which they ſhew themſelves that give them their worth and acceptableneſs. No pious deſires and ſentiments can be what they ought to be, which do not carry us to the acts that are expreſſive of them, and iſſue in devotion. Beſides the deſires and

ſentiments, the acts themſelves, as was before obſerved, are proper. Indeed, it is not conceivable that theſe can be ſeparated. He who has the feelings that become a *creature* and a *ſinner* will not ſtop at inactive deſires and reflections. A conviction of indigence and dependence which has no effect in turning the ſoul towards heaven, and engaging it to direct its deſires to him who alone can fulfil them, is as real a contradiction as a gratitude or benevolence which produces no acts of gratitude and benevolence——. He that is poſſeſſed with proper affections to the Deity will *feel* the reaſonableneſs of Prayer: He will be neceſſarily diſpoſed to it, and incapable of refraining from it without doing violence to himſelf. A perſon who, with due attention and a right temper, conſiders God as his maker and preſerver, the parent of the univerſe, the diſpoſer of all bleſſings, and the ſource of all happineſs, cannot fail to direct his heart to

him in humble and fervent ſupplications. The love of God in the ſoul and prayer are ſo inſeparably connected that they are almoſt the ſame. No one who has a juſt perception of the dependence of all things upon God, and is pierced with a ſenſe of the amiableneſs and excellence of his nature, can help falling down before him in prayer and adoration. No one who knows what he has done to offend him, who ſees himſelf loſt without his protection, and is duly conſcious of his innumerable wants, can avoid flying to him for ſuccour and mercy. One proof of this ariſes from the fact, that there are few who, in times of danger or any particular emergencies and difficulties, do not neceſſarily look up to God for help. It is the voice of nature at theſe times that God is to be prayed to; and indeed, in general, at all times, it appears to be the irreſiſtible ſenſe of mankind that Prayer is reaſonable. There is as much a tendency in our

natures to devotion as to food or ſociety. Our native bent lies evidently this way, which never fails to diſcover itſelf in the moſt irreligious people, when calamities or death threaten them.

To the perſon then who alledges, that ſerious and frequent meditation joined with pious affections and deſires, is all that can be our duty, and that every thing beyond is mere ceremony and folly; it will be proper to reply by aſking—— "Do you indeed practiſe ſuch medi- "tations? Do you poſſeſs theſe pious "affections and deſires, and ſtudy to "cheriſh them by all proper means? "Do you often ſet yourſelf to think of "the Deity, to contemplate his perfec- "tions, to recollect his mercies, and "to endeavour to affect your mind with "a ſenſe of your abſolute dependence "upon him? Can you truly ſay that "you live and act under the power of "religious principles and ſentiments?"—

I may

I may venture to pronounce that you cannot anſwer in the affirmative. It is, therefore, impertinent to make ſuch an objection; nor are you properly qualified to underſtand the full force of the anſwer to it *.

Should

* "Gratitude, love, and eſteem are affections "which decline concealment when they are lively, "we are naturally prone to expreſs them, even "though they give no new happineſs to their "object." *See the chapter on the worſhip due to the Deity in Dr. Hutchinſon's Syſtem of Moral Philoſophy*, Vol. I. p. 217.

—"The human mind feels a powerful impulſe "urging it forward to beg God to beſtow what it "wiſhes for with vehemence: And this very argu-"ment which is urged againſt the lifting up holy "deſires to God (viz. that he is infinite in goodneſs, "and willing to gratify them) is a principal motive "for offering them up; and makes it impoſſible for "a well-diſpoſed mind to abſtain from it." *Dr. Leechman's Sermon on Prayer.*

The impulſe mentioned here and above, urging us to addreſs our deſires of happineſs to God, being plainly natural, is to be conſidered as a direction to pray from the author of nature. The impoſſibility of avoiding it, where there are juſt affections to the Deity, is founded not only on this natural impulſe, but

Should it be again aſked, whether a Being would be leſs favoured by the Deity on account of his omitting Prayer, ſuppoſing this omiſſion to proceed from nothing but a perſuaſion of its impropriety: It would be proper to give the ſame anſwer, as might be given to the ſame queſtion, ſuppoſed to be aſked concerning the omiſſion of any other moral duty from the ſame conviction.

Once more. It may be ſaid, that "the "courſe of things is unalterable; and "that, therefore, no anſwers to Prayer can "be expected, without ſuppoſing God to "work miracles for us, or to break in "upon the general laws and ſettled order of

but alſo on a fitneſs which in this caſe is palpable to every perſon. To repeat deſires in our minds, being at the ſame time ſenſible that the ſupreme diſpoſer of our lot ſtands by us and obſerves them, without yet directing them to him, or looking to him for the accompliſhment of them; this implies a neglect of the giver of all good, ſo repugnant to the ſentiments of the human heart and ſo criminal, as to be abſolutely incompatible with right diſpoſitions.

of the world."—This objection has been diſtinctly anſwered in the Diſſertation on Providence, to which therefore I muſt refer*. I ſhall only obſerve here, that under a perfect government there cannot be any ſuch general laws, as are inconſiſtent with every perſon's being treated agreeably to what he *is* and *does*; and that, conſequently, ſince the diſcharge or neglect of the duty of Prayer is one important circumſtance that goes towards determining the characters and deſerts of Beings, there can be no ſuch laws in nature as render it neceſſary, that reaſonable Beings ſhould be treated in the ſame manner whether they pray or not. This, indeed, is itſelf the principal law and the immutable order of the Divine adminiſtration, "that all Beings ſhall, on "the whole, receive according to their "works:" And it is of but little weight in oppoſition to this, that we cannot ſee diſtinctly in what manner the laws of the

* Page 178, &c.

the world operates towards bringing it about as the great end of God's government, and the laſt iſſue of all preſent events.

Hitherto, I have confined myſelf to the conſideration of Prayer for *ourſelves*. It may be thought that ſomething further ought to be ſaid in defence of Praying for *others*.——"For what influence, "it may be ſaid, can our prayers have "on the ſtate of *others*? What benefit "can they receive from our interceſ-"ſions? Is it to be conceived that God, "like weak men, may be perſuaded "by the importunity of one perſon to "beſtow on another any bleſſings which "he would not elſe have beſtowed, "and for the reception of which no "importunity can render him more "qualified?"

The proper anſwer to this will appear if we conſider, that it is by no means neceſſary

neceſſary to ſuppoſe that the treatment which Beings ſhall receive depends, in all caſes, ſolely on what they are in themſelves. This, without doubt, is what the univerſal Governor *chiefly* regards; but it is not *all*. And tho' there are ſome benefits of ſuch a nature, that no means can obtain them for Beings who have not certain qualifications, there are other benefits which one Being may obtain for another, or for which he may be indebted entirely to the kind offices of his fellow-creatures. An advantage may become proper to be granted to another, in conſequence of ſome circumſtances he may be in, or ſome relations in which he may ſtand to others, which, abſtracted from ſuch circumſtances and relations, would not have been proper*. Nothing is more intelligible than this, or happens more frequently in the common courſe of affairs and events. The whole ſcheme of nature ſeems indeed to be contrived on purpoſe in ſuch a manner,

as

* See before, page 207.

as that Beings might have it in their power, in numberleſs ways to bleſs one another. No attentive perſon can conſider without ſurprize how precarious the ſtate of men in particular is left, and how dependent their moſt important intereſts are made on their conduct to one another. One end of this conſtitution appears plainly to be, to give us room and ſcope for the exerciſe of beneficence. And, in general, it is obvious that had the ſtate and happineſs of Beings been made otherwiſe than precarious and dependent in the manner we find them, all poſſibility of this virtue, and conſequently the ſublimeſt part of rational and moral happineſs, would have been excluded from the creation*.

But not to inſiſt on this. It is ſufficient for my purpoſe, that the general fact is certain; that Beings may, in various ways, be the procuring cauſes of good to

* See the Diſſertation on Providence, page 127, &c.

to one another. So true is this, that almoſt all our happineſs is conveyed to us not immediately from God's hands, but by the inſtrumentality of our fellow-beings, or through them as the channels of his beneficence, in ſuch a ſenſe, that had it not been for their benevolence and voluntary agency, we ſhould have for ever wanted the bleſſings we enjoy.

Let us now apply theſe obſervations to the caſe of Prayer for others.——— Why may not this be one thing that may alter a caſe, and be a reaſon with the Divine Being for ſhewing favour? Why, by praying for one another, may we not, as in many other ways, be uſeful to one another? Why may not the univerſal Father, in conſideration of the humble and benevolent interceſſions of ſome of his children for others, be pleaſed often, in the courſe of his Providence, to direct events for the advantage of the perſons interceded

for

for in a manner that would not otherwiſe have been done? —— No truly benevolent and pious man can help lifting up his heart to the Deity in behalf of his fellow-creatures. No one whoſe breaſt is properly warmed with kind wiſhes to his brethren about him, and who feels within himſelf earneſt deſires to do them all poſſible good, can avoid offering up his kind wiſhes and deſires to the common Benefactor and Ruler, who knows what is beſt for every Being, and who can make thoſe we love infinitely happy. In reality; ſupplications to the Deity for our friends and kindred, and all in whoſe welfare we are concerned, are no leſs *natural* than ſupplications for ourſelves. And are they not alſo *reaſonable?* What is there in them that is not worthy the moſt exalted benevolence? May it not be fit that a wiſe and good Being ſhould pay a regard to them? And may not the regarding and anſwering them, and, in general, granting bleſſings to ſome, on account of the virtue of others, be a

proper method of encouraging and honouring virtue, and of rewarding the benevolence of Beings to one another? ——Perhaps, indeed, it may not be eaſy to conceive how much regard is paid, in the diſpoſals of Providence, to the benevolent deſires and virtue of ſome Beings in the treatment of others. Perhaps, there may not be a better way of encouraging righteouſneſs in the creation, than by making it as much as poſſible the cauſe of happineſs not only to the agent himſelf, but to all connected with him. There is no virtuous Being who would not, in many circumſtances, chuſe to be rewarded with a grant of bleſſings to his fellow-beings rather than to himſelf.

Theſe obſervations ſeem to me ſufficient to defend Prayer for others, and to ſhew that it may have an effect on their condition. Were it true indeed that it could have no ſuch effect, as having of itſelf no influence on the characters or perſonal qualifications of thoſe prayed for, it would be more difficult to defend it.——The immediate

immediate view of every one in praying for another, as well as for himſelf, is to obtain what he prays for; and did any one apprehend that the act of ſupplicating the Deity for others has no tendency to be of any advantage to them, I cannot ſee what could ever lead him to it. No one, I ſuppoſe, will aſſert that what we mean by addreſſing our deſires to the Deity for *others* is ſome benefit to *ourſelves*. It muſt, therefore, be wrong to reſt the whole defence of Prayer on its tendency to promote our moral and religious improvement. This, without doubt, is in the higheſt degree true of it; but it is its *effect*, not its immediate and direct *end*.

Several queſtions, not eaſy to be anſwered, may be aſked about the *extent* of the efficacy of Prayer. But this is not a point into which it is neceſſary for me to enter. All I plead for is, that it is not abſurd to ſuppoſe it *one* thing which the Deity is pleaſed to regard in the communication of good to his creatures. How

far it becomes actually a ground of favour, or what anſwers to it are granted in particular inſtances, we are not capable of determining. There is here, undoubtedly, room for much folly and ſuperſtition. Care ſhould be taken that neither our prayers for ourſelves or others be too particular, and that we indulge no other expectation in conſequence of them than that, if the fruits of genuine benevolence and piety, they ſhall be accepted and heard as far as is conſiſtent with the order of the world and the purpoſes of infinite wiſdom.

It would be very unreaſonable to urge on this occaſion an objection already conſidered: that God is infinitely good, and wants nothing to engage him to grant any bleſſings to thoſe who are not improper objects of them. Nothing is plainer than that this may, with equal force, be urged againſt any other duty of natural religion. The whole queſtion is whether Prayer may not itſelf be a circumſtance *creating* propriety and altering a caſe.

a caſe. For my part, I ſee no ſufficient reaſon for denying the poſſibility of interceſſions or interpoſitions which may make an infinite difference in the caſes of particular Beings, and gain the higheſt bleſſings for them.—But it is time to finiſh this part of the defence of Prayer.

SECT. II.

Of the Importance of Prayer as an inſtrumental Duty; the Happineſs of a devout Temper, and the particular Obligation to public Worſhip.

THERE remain ſome further arguments for Prayer of great weight which muſt not be overlooked. I have hitherto defended it without any regard to its effects on our tempers and lives; but it is neceſſary that theſe ſhould be particularly repreſented, in order more fully to recommend and juſtify it.—Nothing, certainly, can tend more to promote a right conduct and temper and to eſtabliſh within us all good diſpoſitions, than this duty properly diſcharged. He that makes conſcience of frequent and ſerious Prayer muſt live under an habitual ſenſe of the preſence, authority, and providence

dence of God, and of his dependence upon him and obligations to him. He must be continually reminding himself of the most important truths, and exciting himself to the utmost care of his life. He must be always exercising repentance for his transgressions and benevolence to his fellow-creatures. It is scarcely possible for such a man to be otherwise than truly virtuous. The indulgence of known guilt, and a regular course of unaffected devotion are so incompatible, that it is not conceivable that they can be united in one and the same man.——I acknowledge that there are many pretendedly devout people who are as false, spiteful, peevish and covetous, and in every respect as unamiable as any persons in the world: And the scandal given by such has, I believe, contributed more than any thing towards bringing devotion into discredit. But what is the devotion of such?——— A mere lip service; not the work of the soul. The *semblance* of devotion;

not the *reality*. An abuſe of the Almighty; not genuine worſhip and piety. ——Where the true ſpirit of devotion prevails, it cannot fail to render a man more amiable, and to promote the purification of his mind. It will ſtifle in the birth all wrong tendencies; ſubdue the temper to kindneſs and charity; conquer every rebellious inclination, and form the heart and life to univerſal goodneſs.—Can a man ſet himſelf often to realize to himſelf the inſpection of the Deity and to adore his perfections, while he feels himſelf an enemy to his laws and government? Can he with a contrite heart confeſs his ſins, and not reſolve to forſake them? Can he ſo mock his tremendous Creator as to ſeek favour from him while he goes on to affront him; or to beg that love and forgiveneſs to *himſelf* which he is not willing to practiſe to *others*? Can he pray for thoſe who *deſpitefully uſe* * *him and perſecute him*, and at the ſame time indulge rancour in

* Matth. v. 44.

in his heart? In ſhort; can he employ himſelf in turning his attention frequently to eternal righteouſneſs and goodneſs, without participating of ſome degrees of theſe excellencies; or preſerve a conſtant intercourſe between his mind and the firſt and beſt of all Beings, without growing like to him and being confirmed in pious gratitude and reſignation?——

'Tis one of the juſteſt obſervations, that what we don't think of is the ſame to us as if it did not exiſt. There is little or no difference between what is not *conſidered* and what is not *believed.* It is the *reflexion* on what is believed that renders it uſeful to us, and gives it its whole power to influence us. The practice, therefore, of ſtated Prayer muſt be of unſpeakable uſe, as it is perpetually fixing our reflexions on thoſe truths which are the ſprings and ſupports of goodneſs. There is nothing does this ſo well. There is nothing engages the attention ſo cloſely to the moſt important truths, and conſequently nothing

that

that has ſo much power to excite good affections, and to keep alive and confirm good reſolutions. I will venture to add, that for this reaſon it muſt be the beſt means of preparing our minds for Divine influences, and of drawing into them thoſe irradiations of Divine grace which upright and pure minds have reaſon to expect. When in the midſt of the hurry of life and full of its cares, our minds are not properly ſuſceptible of good impreſſions. But when we retire from the world, and employ ourſelves in the duties of devotion, all ſenſible objects loſe their power; the tumults of paſſion ſubſide; the voice of the Deity within us is capable of being heard, and our breaſts are thrown open to heavenly communications.

We may then lay it down as certain, that Prayer is in the greateſt degree ſubſervient to virtue, and productive of the higheſt advantages. 'Tis in this that the

the converſion of the ſoul to religious goodneſs generally firſt ſhews itſelf. 'Tis the beſt friend of every virtue, a faithful monitor in all ſeaſons, a powerful quickener in every laudable undertaking, and one of the chief ſprings of that wiſdom which is from above, and that peace which the world cannot give.

But it muſt be here attended to, that though Prayer is inſtrumental to virtue in the manner now repreſented, it is by no means *merely* an *inſtrumental duty*. This muſt be acknowledged if what has been before ſaid is juſt. It appears to me unqueſtionable that it is a prime and original duty of natural religion, which derives its obligation, not *ſolely* from its effects, but is of *intrinſick* obligation and rectitude.——I muſt add, that it is the higheſt poſſible recommendation of Prayer, that it is not only *itſelf* virtue, but the *beſt means* of virtue; not only itſelf a duty, but of the greateſt

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uſe to maintain and increaſe a regard to all other duties.

What has been laſt inſiſted on naturally leads to an obſervation proper to be juſt mentioned, and which will ſet the reaſonableneſs of Prayer in a light ſomewhat different from that in which we have hitherto viewed it. — Suppoſe that it had no *immediate* propriety in it, yet if it is ſo important a means of virtue, and ſo uſeful towards impreſſing on the mind pious ſentiments; if without it we ſhould neceſſarily grow more remiſs and careleſs, leſs mindful of the Deity and leſs affected with his perfections; this alone affords to the Deity the higheſt reaſon for commanding it, and making the regular diſcharge of it a ſtanding law of his government, and a ſtanding condition of his favour.———And as in the repreſentation before given of Prayer, it implied no reflexion on the goodneſs of God, to maintain that he expects us to do what we *ought* to do; that is, addreſs

addreſs him and *aſk* for bleſſings before we *have* them: So here, there is plainly much leſs reaſon for ſuch an objection; our ideas of Divine goodneſs being not diminiſhed but magnified by ſuppoſing, that he makes ſolemn acts which are conducive to our higheſt perfection neceſſary to our being favoured by him.

Before I proceed further, I cannot help ſtopping to take notice on this occaſion particularly of the *interceſſionary* part of Prayer, as a moſt obvious inſtance of the tendency of Prayer to improve us.—No one can avoid ſeeing how happy an effect this muſt have in ſweetening our tempers, in reconciling us to all about us, and cauſing every unfriendly paſſion to die away within us. We cannot offer up prayers to God for our fellow-men, without ſetting them before our minds in ſome of the moſt engaging lights poſſible; as partaking of the ſame natures with ourſelves, liable to the ſame wants and ſufferings, and in the ſame helpleſs

circumſtances; as children of the ſame father, ſubjects of the ſame all-wiſe government, and heirs of the ſame hopes. He who prays for others, with underſtanding and ſincerity muſt ſee himſelf on the ſame level with them; he muſt be ready to do them all the good in his power; he muſt be pleaſed with whatever happineſs they enjoy; he can do nothing to leſſen their credit or comfort; and fervent deſires will naturally riſe within him, while thus engaged, that his own breaſt may be the ſeat of all thoſe good diſpoſitions and virtues which he prays that they may be bleſt with. Reſentment and envy can never be indulged by one who, whenever he finds himſelf tempted to them, has recourſe to this duty, and ſets himſelf to recommend to the Divine favour the perſons who excite within him theſe paſſions. No deſire of retaliation or revenge, nothing of unpeaceableneſs, ill-nature, or haughtineſs can eaſily ſhew itſelf in a heart kept under this guard and diſcipline.

How is it poſſible to uſe *him* ill for whom we are conſtant advocates with God? How excellent a parent or friend is *he* likely to make, who always remembers before God the concerns and intereſts of his children and friends, in the ſame manner that he remembers his own? Is there a more rational way of expreſſing benevolence than this; or a more effectual way of promoting and enlarging it?——Nothing is more deſirable or more delightful than to feel ourſelves continually under the power of kind affections to all about us. Would we be thus happy? Would we have our hearts in a conſtant ſtate of love and good-will? Would we have every tender ſentiment ſtrong and active in our breaſts? —Let us be conſtant and diligent in this part of devotion, and pray continually for others, as we do for ourſelves.

I might in this manner go through all the different parts of Prayer, and point out particularly the happy influence which

which they are fitted to have on our tempers and conduct. But this would be, in a great meaſure, a needleſs work; it being hardly poſſible to doubt on this point.

From the whole of what has been ſaid we may now collect the following reaſons for Prayer, which deſerve our careful attention.

1ſt, It is in itſelf neceſſarily right We cannot omit it without violating the plaineſt reaſon; without contradicting the higheſt relations in which we ſtand; and, in effect, ſetting ourſelves up as ſelf-ſufficient and independent. Nothing can be criminal if it be not ſo to forget Him from whom alone comes every good gift; to neglect Him who is the bliſs of all nature. Shocking, certainly, is the guilt of every irreligious perſon. He ſhould bluſh to lay any claim to true worth of character.

2dly,

2dly, Prayer is neceſſary to promote a good temper in us, and to train us up in righteouſneſs. Without it all our virtues will wither, our good deſires and reſolutions will languiſh, and religious truth loſe its power over our minds. Prayer rightly performed implies the lively exerciſe of love, gratitude, humility, repentance, hope, reſignation, and almoſt all the worthy principles that can actuate the heart. When this is neglected they lie dormant, and muſt tend to decay.——As a heart overflowing with love to God and man will unavoidably give itſelf vent in Prayer; ſo Prayer has a tendency to carry this bleſſed temper to its higheſt pitch; nor is it eaſily to be conceived how friendly an influence theſe have on one another, or how cloſely they are connected.——Nothing can be more ſublime than a ſpirit of unaffected and zealous devotion. A heart inſpired with this muſt be holy and pure, prepared for every good work, and filled with every

Divine grace. This ſacred fire, wherever it enters, will conſume the droſs of the mind and refine all its powers. Serious and attentive Prayers bring us to a nearer view of the Divine perfections, and draws light and glory from them into our hearts. By this we elevate ourſelves above ſenſible objects, unite our ſouls to the firſt good, ſurrender our wills to God's will, and maintain in ourſelves a conſtant and chearful acquieſcence in that order of events which his wiſdom has appointed.—In ſhort, Prayer is the main duty of religious virtue; the neareſt approach to God we are now capable of; the immediate exerciſe of our nobleſt affections on their higheſt object, and the ſupport and life of all true piety.

3dly, It is incumbent upon us to pray as we hope for the favour of God. This is *one* qualification for his favour; *one* important means of obtaining bleſſings from him. Thoſe who omit it muſt

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be under his diſpleaſure; but thoſe who acknowledge him in all their ways, and live under a ſenſe of his rightful dominion expreſſed by all ſuitable actions, muſt be approved by him, and the objects of his peculiar care. It is impoſſible that he ſhould not make a difference between them and the impious men who addreſs no acknowledgments to him.

To theſe arguments for Prayer taken from what has been ſaid to ſhew the reaſonableneſs of it, I will add that the Chriſtian revelation enjoins it. This, I know, will weigh but little with moſt of thoſe who object to this duty. But it muſt have great weight with every attentive Chriſtian.——Our holy religion exhorts us *to pray without ceaſing*; *to pray always with all manner of prayer, and ſupplication in the ſpirit*; *to continue in prayer, and watch unto the ſame with thankſgiving*; *to liſt up every where holy hands without wrath or ſtrife, and to make ſupplications*

and interceſſions for all men, ſince this is good and acceptable in the ſight of God. This duty is particularly recommended to us by the example of Chriſt himſelf, the founder of our faith and hopes *. The accounts we have of the time he ſpent in devotion, and of his regularly performing all the offices of it, prove that this muſt be an important part of righteouſneſs, and that there is no virtue ſo perfect, or dignity of character ſo great as to ſuperſede the reaſons on which the obligation to it is founded. Such imperfect and ſinful creatures as we are have certainly peculiar reaſons for it, and therefore muſt be in the higheſt degree inexcuſable if they neglect it.—— But further; Chriſt has encouraged us to this part of duty by promiſing particular favour to thoſe who diligently practiſe

* Matth. xiv. 23. *When he had ſent the multitude away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray.* Luke vi. 12. *He went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.*

practiſe it. That efficacy of Prayer to obtain bleſſings for us which I have endeavoured to prove and explain, is by him clearly aſſerted. Thus Matth. vii. 7. *Aſk and ye ſhall have. Seek and ye ſhall find. Knock and it ſhall be opened to you. For every one that aſketh, receiveth. He that ſeeketh, findeth. And to him that knocketh, it ſhall be opened.* Matth. vi. 6. *But thou when thou prayeſt, enter into thy cloſet, and pray to the Father in ſecret; and thy Father who ſeeth in ſecret ſhall reward thee openly.*———To the ſame purpoſe he has taught us in the parable of the widow and unjuſt judge. Luke xviii.

But let it be remembered, that though Chriſtianity thus commands Prayer, it is by no means merely a chriſtian duty. It is an eſſential part of all religion. All nations of men acknowledge the obligation to it, and the practice of it has been as univerſal as the belief of a Deity.

In the laſt place. I would recommend this duty from the conſideration of the pleaſures that attend the due diſcharge of it. Prayer, as has been before obſerved, is the exerciſe of our higheſt affections on their higheſt object, and the intercourſe of our minds with uncreated and ſovereign goodneſs. It muſt, therefore, be the foundation of the higheſt pleaſure.—It is alſo in Prayer that the happineſs ariſing from the practice of virtue, and the hope and triumph it inſpires are chiefly felt. At no other time are we ſo open to the cauſes of virtuous pleaſure, or ſo diſpoſed to the moſt joyous and exalting reflexions. It is in the power of every one who will make the experiment, to ſatisfy himſelf about this. What delight does a virtuous man often feel when he puts himſelf ſolemnly into the preſence of his Maker, and conſiders him as one with his ſoul and as obſerving every motion within it; when he implores all ſuitable bleſſings from him, with a lively faith in his readineſs

readineſs to give him more than he can aſk or think; when he adores his inconceivable excellencies, and magnifies and bleſſes that love which gave being to the world; when he commits his whole exiſtence to him with boundleſs hope, and gives full ſcope to every pious and grateful affection? What rapture and raviſhment attend ſuch exerciſes, and how high do they lift our ſouls *?——Words are indeed wanting here; nor is it poſſible properly to deſcribe the pleaſure there is in all the

* "In theſe the ſoul is enlightened, enlarged, "raiſed, raviſhed. In theſe it ſoars up to heaven, "and looks down upon earth. In theſe it poſſeſſes "ſtability and ſecurity, peace and reſt in the midſt "of a frail unſtable nature, and a reſtleſs and "tumultuous world. In theſe all the paſſions of "the ſoul are exerciſed with a moſt tender ſenſible "delight, ſorrow, fear, or reverence. Hate and "indignation do here expreſs themſelves to the "height, not only without any diſorder or torture, "but alſo with great contentment and ſatisfaction "of our nature. Love, hope, joy reign here "without either check or ſatiety." *Dr. Lucas's Enquiry after Happineſs.* Vol. I. p. 117.

the acts of devotion; in addreſſing our deſires, with a pure heart, to our almighty parent; in praiſing him for his innumerable benefits; in beſeeching him to cauſe us to grow in every amiable diſpoſition; in interceding with him for thoſe we love; in feeling benevolence, gratitude, and hope kindling within us before his eye; in ſpreading our wants and perplexities before him, and ſeeking direction and help from him; in throwing our cares and burdens upon him, and referring ourſelves to his diſpoſal, ſo as not to retain any *wiſh* of any thing which he is pleaſed to forbid or deny. Even the tears of penitential ſorrow and contrition, or of ſympathy and benevolence, into which a devout perſon may ſometimes be melted, have a ſweetneſs in them not to be expreſſed, and are more to be deſired than the greateſt joys of the irreligious. —— Am I, reader, now talking to you a language, you do not underſtand? Have you never felt any of the pleaſures I am now

ſpeaking of? Do you not know what it is to look up to God in private and to pour out your ſoul before him?—— Unhappy then are you, and a ſtranger yet to what you ought to be beſt acquainted with.

In order to obtain a juſt ſenſe of the pleaſures connected with devotion, it ſhould be remembered with how much more force our affections ought to exert themſelves before the Deity than in any other circumſtances, and what greater influence his preſence ought to have over us than the preſence of inferior Beings. It is certain that we have more to do with him than with all nature, that he may be infinitely more our happineſs than any of thoſe objects which he has adapted to our faculties, and that the neareſt and moſt important of all relations is that between a *creature* and the *Creator*. The approach, therefore, of an upright mind, poſſeſt of juſt views and proper feelings, to the Deity,

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to its guardian and life and greateſt friend, cannot but be productive of the higheſt effects.——But it will not be amiſs, on this occaſion, particularly to compare the pleaſures of devotion with thoſe ariſing from contemplating the works of the Deity. In ſtudying the laws and order of the univerſe we converſe only with effects, but in devotion our minds are turned immediately to the cauſe, and contemplate, not the *ſhadows* or *ſigns* of wiſdom, power, and goodneſs, but theſe qualities themſelves as they exiſt in the neceſſary nature of the Deity. How much higher objects of contemplation and admiration muſt uncreated excellence and abſolute perfection be, than any traces of theſe or emanations from them? 'Tis in God alone, in the ſupreme intelligence which fills all things and from whence all order and good ſprung, that we can find complete fulneſs of all that is lovely and beatifying, and where every power within us can have room for its utmoſt exertion.

It

It cannot be doubted but that the pleaſures I am now ſpeaking of will conſtitute a principal part of our happineſs in every future period of our exiſtence. We can indeed enjoy them but very imperfectly here. Many low cares and deſires are continually forcing themſelves into our minds, and diſtracting their attention, and rendering it impoſſible for us to diſengage them enough from ſenſible objects, and to acquaint ourſelves with God in the manner we deſire. But hereafter we may hope to get nearer acceſs to him, and obtain clearer views of his glory and majeſty. All that now retards the flight of our ſouls to him and checks their happineſs in him will be removed. Every cloud that now hides him from our ſight will vaniſh, and we ſhall be able to feel his preſence with us in a manner we cannot now conceive. How high then will the pleaſures of devotion riſe? With what ardor and tranſport ſhall we be able to worſhip and to praiſe him, to caſt our

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ſouls before him, and to delight ourſelves in him?——But let it be remembered, that this is a happineſs which will never be enjoyed by any who forget God now. If we allow ourſelves in guilt and irreligion, or cultivate no acquaintance with the Deity in this life, we cannot be fit for ſeeing him and dwelling with him in another life. A courſe of preſent devotion, as it will give us ſome foretaſtes of the happineſs of heaven, is alſo neceſſary to inure us to it and prepare us for it.

I cannot omit obſerving further, under this head, that devotion is not only, in the *immediate exerciſe* of it, thus a ſource of happineſs, but alſo conſtitutes a general temper conducive in the higheſt degree to happineſs. The ſpirit of Prayer is the ſpirit of hope, humility, gratitude and reſignation; and muſt, therefore, as far as we are poſſeſſed of it, be productive of an inward ſatisfaction and tranquillity which are preferable to all

all ſenſible delights. A mind thus turned has many ſources of pleaſure peculiar to itſelf. 'Tis elevated above the tumults of this world, and can preſerve ſelf-enjoyment in all circumſtances, and take up its reſt in God in the midſt of outward troubles and calamities.—— A truly devout temper is indeed the very temper of bliſs. It cheriſhes and ſtrengthens all the tender and agreeable affections, and checks all the turbulent and painful ones. It diſpoſes us to receive pleaſure from every object about us, gives new luſtre to the face of nature, renders every agreeable ſcene and occurrence more agreeable, heightens the reliſh of every common bleſſing, and improves and refines all our enjoyments. How bleſt is that man whoſe deſires are continually directed to heaven; who is always exerciſing gratitude to the Deity and truſt in him; whoſe heart is kept cloſe with him, and whoſe thoughts are full of him; who taſtes his beneficence in whatever gives him pleaſure; who terminates

terminates all his views in him, and has learnt to carry his attention from every degree of beauty and good, in created Beings, to the inexhauſtible fountain of all beauty and good? What peace and ſerenity muſt fill a mind aſſured that its affairs are under the *beſt* direction; conſcious of its intereſt in almighty love; and whoſe regard is habitually fixt on that unſearchable wiſdom which conducts all events?

I will add, that devotion greatly improves the pleaſure attending all enquiries into nature, and advances in the knowledge of it. The difference between the pleaſure received by a devout and an indevout mind in obſerving the univerſe, is like that between the pleaſure received from the ſame cauſe by a man and a brute. 'Tis the conſideration of the univerſe as God's work, and the obſervation of his power, wiſdom, and goodneſs diſplayed in it, that cloath it with its chief beauties,

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and render it in the higheſt degree a delightful ſpectacle. There is no greater incentive to devotion than an attentive conſideration of the glorious order of nature; nor is there any tendency within us more natural than that ariſing from hence to religious adoration. And there is an inexpreſſible pitifulneſs in the character of a man who ſtifles this tendency; who confines his views to *ſecond* cauſes, and forgets the *firſt*; who ſees not the Deity in his works; who devotes his time to philoſophical reſearches, but ſatisfies himſelf with mere ſpeculation, who can ſurvey the world, enjoy its pleaſures, and reflect on its wonderful ſtructure, without lifting up his heart to the author of it, without being warmed into praiſe, or feeling any pious and devout emotions.——Admiration is one of the moſt pleaſing affections of our natures; and this cannot but be excited in the moſt inſenſible mind, upon obſerving the works of the creation. But then only is our admiration what it ought

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to be, and the pleaſure attending it complete, when it is exalted into devotion. 'Tis devotion that conſecrates knowledge and renders it ſubſervient to its proper end; that gives unbounded ſcope to our moſt raiſed affections, and employs our faculties on an object every way adequate to them.

Thus we ſee what reaſons there are for Prayer, and what motives we have to practiſe it.——The natures of things render it our indiſpenſible duty. Our improvement in true virtue, and even its very being within us, depend upon it. The uncorrupted dictates of our own minds, and the general ſenſe and voice of mankind proclaim the fitneſs of it, and call us to it. The favour of God to us; our intereſt in the protection and bleſſing of his all-diſpoſing Providence, and the ſupply of our various wants are in a great meaſure connected with it. The Chriſtian revelation enjoins it; and it is, moreover, a means of

of maintaining communion between heaven and our minds, a ſource of pleaſure of the higheſt kind, and a neceſſary preparation for eternal happineſs.—If then we value *all* that is moſt important, or if the plaineſt and ſtrongeſt conſiderations of reaſon, duty and intereſt can influence us, we ſhall not live in the omiſſion of Prayer.

What I have hitherto ſaid is applicable chiefly to *private* Prayer. I ſhall now beg leave to add a few obſervations particularly on *family* and *public* Prayer.

If the former is right, there can be no doubt but that the latter is ſo likewiſe. There are few or no objections to the one, which may not be equally made to the other. We are to conſider ourſelves not only as private perſons, but as members of families and of ſociety, and in theſe capacities ought to offer up praiſes and ſupplications to God.

With reſpect to *family* Prayer, I cannot help aſking with ſerioufneſs and concern; where the religion of that family can be that never meets for religious worſhip? With what reaſon can ſuch a family expect the bleſſing of heaven upon it? Is it not fit that thoſe who live together in the ſame houſe, and are connected to one another by the cloſeſt ties; who in common depend entirely upon God, need continually his care, and are always receiving mercies from him; is it not fit, I ſay, that theſe ſhould alſo join together in owning their common dependence and obligations, in ſeeking that protection they need, and in paying homage to their great preſerver and guardian? Can they imagine that they will on the whole do equally well, whether they make conſcience of this or diſregard it? Is it of no importance that thoſe who have children or ſervants under their care ſhould endeavour to teach them the fear of God, and do what they can to inſtil

inſtil good principles into them, to keep them mindful of their duty, and preſerve them from the greateſt of all dangers; the danger of loſing eternal happineſs, and being undone for ever by guilt and irreligion? Is it incumbent on them to provide for their *bodies*; and ought they to take no care of their *ſouls*, of their reaſonable and immortal part? But how little care of this kind can be taken, and under what great diſadvantages muſt children and ſervants lie, if thoſe who have the direction of them ſeldom or never call them together to worſhip God? ——Surely that religion muſt be very careleſs, which extends not to our families, and ſuffers us to forget God in them. And we ought to remember that a *careleſs* religion is likely to prove an *inſufficient* religion.——In a word. If the chief intereſts of a family are to be conſulted, or the firſt of all the relations in which we ſtand to be regarded, family Prayer is reaſonable and proper; nor can

any perſon deny this with any colour of reaſon, who acknowledges the obligation to pray at all. If then it is reaſonable and proper, how can the ſtated omiſſion of it be reconciled to a character of ſound virtue?——"Conſtant family worſhip "(ſays the excellent Archbiſhop *Tillotſon*) "is ſo neceſſary to keep alive a ſenſe of "God and religion in the minds of men, "that I ſee not how any family that "neglects it can in reaſon be eſteemed a "family of Chriſtians, or indeed to have "any religion at all."

I know of no tolerable plea that can be found for the omiſſion of this duty. There is no maſter of a family who ſhould not be aſhamed to ſay that he cannot find time (ſuppoſe one quarter of an hour in every day) for one of the moſt important and reaſonable of all works. And there have been ſo many good forms of prayer for the uſe of families publiſhed, that no one can plead

want of abilities who is at all able to read.

Let us next turn our thoughts to public worſhip.

It is very evident that in conſequence of the principle of ſympathy in the human heart, every act or ſervice in which we engage in company with one another is likely to be performed with more delight, and to be productive of greater effects. Our affections operate in ſociety with particular force. We are naturally warmed by the preſence of one another, and inſenſibly catch one another's feelings. This, I think, ſuggeſts a reaſon of great weight for the public exerciſes of religion; for it proves that they have a particular tendency to impreſs the minds of men, and to do them good.—— But not to inſiſt on this.——'Tis ſurely a moſt obvious principle of natural religion, that God ought to be publickly

worſhipped. Nothing can be more becoming creatures linked together in ſociety, and ſo united to one another by nature, intereſt and public affections as men are, and who have ſo many common wants and cares, than, at ſtated times, to agree with one heart and voice, in addreſſing their deſires to their common parent. Is it poſſible that there ſhould be any impartial perſon who can avoid ſeeing and feeling a congruity and becomingneſs in this? Is there a more agreeable or noble ſight, than that of a multitude of reaſonable Beings engaged in offering up their joint homage and thankſgivings to the ſupreme ruler and benefactor?——The heathens appear to have been univerſally ſenſible of the obligation to public worſhip, and they had public forms of devotion on which they conſcientiouſly attended. It is therefore ſurprizing that any who are not atheiſts ſhould be able, with any peace or ſatisfaction, to allow themſelves in the neglect

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of it. Such do really in effect withdraw themſelves from the government of God, reject his authority over them, deny his Providence, and declare they have no dependence upon him, or obligations to him.——But, beſides; let it be conſidered what would be the conſequence if all were to follow the example of ſuch, and what would then be the ſtate of mankind. Are not the public and ſtated forms of religion the evident means of keeping up order in the world, and of preſerving in the minds of men ſome ſenſe of morality and duty? Were theſe aboliſhed, how many of the moſt powerful reſtraints from vice would be taken away? How ſoon ſhould we ſink into the ſavageneſs and barbariſm of Indians and Hottentots? What multitudes would be loſt in ignorance and guilt who now, under the influence of the public ſervices of religion, are trained up in piety and goodneſs for future happineſs *? Was there then nothing to engage

* "And were it not for that ſenſe of virtue which

engage perſons to an attendance on public worſhip, beſides the influence their example may have, this alone ſhould be ſufficient. And this ſhews us alſo how poor an excuſe it is which ſome make when they ſay, that they know already all they are likely to hear from the pulpit; and that they can improve their time at home as well as at a place of public

"is principally preſerved, ſo far as it is preſerved, "by national forms and habits of religion, men "would ſoon loſe it all, run wild, prey upon one "another, and do what elſe the worſt of ſavages do." See *Mr. Wollaſton's Religion of Nature delineated*, Sect. V.

"'Tis plainly our duty to promote virtue and happineſs among others. Our worſhipping in ſociety, "our recounting thankfully God's benefits, our explaining his nature and perfections, our expreſſing "our admiration, eſteem, gratitude and love, preſents to the minds of others, the proper motives "of like affections; and by a contagion, obſervable in all our paſſions, naturally tends to raiſe "them in others. Piety thus diffuſed in a ſociety "is the ſtrongeſt reſtraint from evil, and adds new "force to every ſocial diſpoſition, to every engagement to good offices." *Dr. Hutcheſon's Syſtem of Moral Philoſophy*, Vol. I. p. 217.

public worſhip. For ſuppoſing this true of the perſons who talk thus, they ought to remember that it is not true of the bulk of mankind, who plainly need the aid of public inſtructions and admonitions. By abſenting themſelves, therefore, they contribute towards defeating the effect of what is calculated to promote the general good. They ought, beſides, to conſider that the end of attending on the public ſervices of religion is not merely to receive inſtruction; but to worſhip God, to join as members of ſociety in honouring and glorifying our common Lord by celebrating his praiſes together, and publickly acknowledging and ſupplicating him. This is what cannot be done at home. And there is no excuſe or apology poſſible which can make the ſtated and voluntary omiſſion of it otherwiſe than criminal and ſhameful. I cannot indeed reflect, without ſome indignation, on the conduct of thoſe who allow themſelves

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in this guilt, who diſcover ſo little reverence for the Deity, and regard to *decency* as to chuſe to be ſauntering, feaſting, or ſleeping, while their fellow-creatures are engaged in attending to truths of infinite importance, and in offering up their acknowledgments to the giver of all good. How aſtoniſhing is it that this ſhould be ſo common as it is; that in a land of light and knowledge, in this Chriſtian and proteſtant nation, the public worſhip of God ſhould be more ſlighted, and the places deſigned for it more deſerted than perhaps ever was known among civilized pagans? Nothing can have a much worſe aſpect on the welfare of the nation, or threaten it with greater evils. When a people become generally irreligious and impious, they become ungovernable, untractable, ready for every evil work, and ripe for miſery and deſtruction. Religion, to ſay the leaſt of it, is a moſt uſeful engine of ſtate, and one of the beſt ſupports of public order,

order. If we conſider it only in this light, it is the proper object of public encouragement *; and the perſon who does not ſtudy to countenance it in his conduct, is ſo far a pernicious member of ſociety.

Before I proceed to what further lies before me in this diſcourſe, it comes in my

* By the public encouragement that ſhould be given to religion, I do not mean the magiſtrate's interpoſing his authority to require compliance with any particular form of it, or to raiſe any one religious party above others. This would be going out of his province, and has hitherto been nothing but an encroachment on liberty, the ſhoaring up of error, the deſtruction of peace and harmony, and a violation of ſome of the moſt important rights of mankind. The way in which it is earneſtly to be wiſhed that all in public ſtations would encourage religion is by their *example*; by employing their influence to promote a conſcientious regard to it in thoſe forms of it which every one approves moſt; by leading the way in an attendance on its public ſervices, and at the ſame time protecting alike all who are ſincere in the profeſſion of it.

my way to take particular notice of two extremes into which men are apt to fall; both common, and both fatal.—— The firſt, and that which it is moſt to my preſent purpoſe to mention, is the extreme into which thoſe perſons fall who pay no regard to piety or any of its duties, but profeſs great zeal for juſtice and gratitude and all ſocial duties. As far as ſuch practiſe ſocial duties, and are truly faithful and benevolent, they cannot be too much honoured. But while they continue regardleſs of the Deity, and void of devotion, there is ſurely an eſſential defect in their characters. They want the living root; they want the beſt ſupport, and a capital part of real goodneſs. The Deity ought to be the object of the firſt regard of a virtuous man. Love to him muſt be his prevailing affection; and he cannot but be anxious about making the proper acknowledgments of him in every capacity and relation of life. The exerciſes of devotion, I have ſhewn, are

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ſome of the nobleſt employments of our minds; moſt worthy of our rational powers; moſt perfective of our tempers and characters, and productive of the greateſt delight. Can then a good man neglect theſe?——A good man without religion——A benevolent heart without love to the firſt benevolence.—A grateful mind without gratitude to its greateſt benefactor.——A righteous life without prayer; without any acts expreſſing ſuitable diſpoſitions to the head and parent of the creation.—What palpable contradictions are theſe?

The other extreme I meant, and the worſt by far of the two, is that into which thoſe fall who are zealous for devotion, and exact in all poſitive and religious duties, but at the ſame time neglect ſocial duties; make religion a cloak for wickedneſs; indulge cenſorioufneſs and uncharitableneſs; and will lie, trick, cheat, calumniate, undermine and prevaricate. Theſe are indeed deteſtable. They

They know nothing of *true* devotion. They are, on many accounts, ſome of the vileſt of mankind.——It ſhould be our earneſt ſtudy to diſcharge our *whole* duty, and to acquire an univerſally right temper and character. Nothing ſhort of this can denominate us *truly* virtuous. No zeal for any one ſpecies of virtue or punctuality in ſome parts of duty, while others are neglected, can avail to our acceptance.

I have ſuch an opinion of the importance of this, that I cannot help endeavouring here to engage attention to it by dwelling a little longer upon it, with a particular view to the two ſorts of characters I have mentioned.——It is univerſally acknowledged, that a virtuous man is one who acts in conformity to his duty. We can have no other idea of a *virtuous* as diſtinguiſhed from a *vicious* man. But let us conſider what muſt be meant when this is ſaid. Can the meaning be that a man

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is virtuous if he diſcharges a *part* of his duty only, or if he conforms to it in *more* inſtances than he tranſgreſſes it? If this is true, then, ſuppoſing our whole duty to be contained under any number of heads, as for inſtance, under temperance, gratitude, juſtice, benevolence, and piety; it will follow that a man who practiſes three of theſe will be a virtuous man, though he neglects the other two. If he is temperate, juſt, and pious, he is a virtuous man, though he wants gratitude and benevolence. Or if he is grateful, juſt and benevolent, he is a virtuous man, though he wants piety and temperance. On the contrary; he only will be a vicious man who poſſeſſes only two of theſe and wants the reſt. Is it poſſible that any perſon can maintain ſuch an abſurdity?——When St. Paul aſſures us, that neither *fornicators*, nor *covetous men*, nor *drunkards*, nor *revilers*, nor *extortioners*, ſhall inherit the kingdom of God; did he mean that a *fornicator*, or a *covetous man*, or a *drunk-*

a *drunkard*, or an *extortioner* ſhall inherit the kingdom of God, provided he has but that one vice, and fulfils his duty in other inſtances? When eternal happineſs is promiſed in the New Teſtament to all that *repent*; does it mean by *repentance*, not the forſaking of *all* ſins, but all except that *one* which we love moſt?—If ſuch doctrine is right; with what ſort of characters will heaven be filled? Who is there that will not be ſaved?—But let no one thus deceive himſelf. If there is any regard due to ſome of the plaineſt dictates of reaſon and ſcripture, it is paſt doubt that no kind of *partial* goodneſs can be *true* goodneſs, and that he only is virtuous who endeavours faithfully to do his *whole* duty. The ſame truth will appear very evidently if we conſider true goodneſs as conſiſting, not in having (what no Being can want) a regard to rectitude, but in being *governed* by it: For, certainly, it cannot *govern* where there is any one paſſion that *overpowers* it, or where there is any

any known guilt indulged, or *any known* obligation neglected in the ſtated courſe of life. Virtue, we ſhould remember, is one undivided thing. It is the ſame in all the different parts of it; and an *habitual* diſregard to it, in any one inſtance, is diſregarding the whole, and betrays moſt manifeſtly a heart falſe to its intereſt, and void of a juſt affection for it. —— But not to ſay more on this ſubject *.

I am ſenſible that I have been in danger of incurring the deriſion of ſome perſons, by talking as I have done of family religion, of the pleaſures of devotion, and of happineſs in the Deity. —— But this gives me no great concern. What I have been inſiſting upon is, in my opinion, of unſpeakable importance. Thoſe who have entertained contrary opinions are welcome to reject it. I can only wiſh

* It is conſidered at large in *The Review of the principal Queſtions in Morals*, Chap. IX.

it was poſſible for me to convince them of a miſtake which, I think, moſt unhappy and dangerous. ——Others, by what has been ſaid of devotion, private and public, as indiſpenſably obligatory in itſelf, and the ſupport and life of virtue, may be led to reflect very ſeriouſly on the ſtate of his fellow-men. An ardent and at the ſame time a rational and unaffected devotion is one of the chief excellencies and glories we can poſſeſs. Nothing can make us appear more venerable, or beſtow greater dignity on our characters. But where ſhall we find much of it? What numbers either pour contempt on devotion by principle, or neglect it through a criminal indolence, or diſgrace it miſerably by the tricks of ſuperſtition and the madneſs of enthuſiaſm? How unaccuſtomed to the beſt and moſt neceſſary exerciſes; how immerſed in ſenſe; how full of low cares; how inattentive to the Divine nature, and deſtitute of heavenly affections, are a great part of mankind? —— When,

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indeed, I conſider that piety and ſimplicity and purity and prevailing regard to every known obligation, which are neceſſary to conſtitute genuine goodneſs; and when I compare theſe with the careleſneſs and defects of numberleſs perſons about me, and even of ſeveral who on many accounts are reſpectable and worthy, I cannot help feeling a painful concern and grief.—Would to God we were all more diligent, and more ſolicitous about acquiring true worth, and leaving nothing undone that reaſon and piety require.

SECT. III.

Of the Manner in which Prayer ought to be performed.

I HAVE now finiſhed the firſt part of my deſign in this Diſſertation. What I had further in view was to repreſent the manner in which Prayer ought to be performed, in order to render it an acceptable and profitable ſervice.

The firſt obſervation I ſhall make on this ſubject is, that Prayer ought to be performed with a mind properly prepared for it, and with fixed and compoſed thoughts. 'Tis an important and ſolemn work, and no pains can be too great to perform it in a becoming manner. Before we engage in it, 'tis proper to take time for ſerious recollection,

lection, for conſidering what we are going to do, and endeavouring to bring our minds to a right temper, and to impreſs them with ſuitable deſires and ſentiments. 'Tis not likely to be attended with great advantages when this is neglected, or when performed with minds full of worldly cares, ruffled by paſſion, or diſſipated by pleaſure.——But if it is thus proper to prepare ourſelves for Prayer, it muſt be much more ſo to avoid all levity and abſence of mind when actually engaged in it: For otherwiſe we ſhall not *pray* at all, but *mock* the Deity with unmeaning ſounds. What can be more indecent, or expreſs greater diſreſpect to the Moſt High, than to *draw nigh to him with our lips, while our hearts are far from him*; to pretend to addreſs ourſelves to him, and at the ſame time to ſuffer our thoughts to wander to the ends of the earth? Can we think he will hold them guiltleſs who thus *triſle* with him?——If we worſhip him at all, it ought to be with a guard

upon our attention, with an awe of him upon our minds, and an inward and ſincere devotion. No bodily ſervices or external pageantry and ſhew can pleaſe him. He is an omnipreſent and perfect mind, who looks to our minds, and regards nothing but the acts of our minds.———'Tis true, the beſt men are liable to wanderings and diſtractions of mind in religious exerciſes. But ſome there are who are utterly inexcuſable this way; who indulge themſelves in inattention, and ſatisfy themſelves with the careleſs repetition of a ſet of words and the mere *form* of worſhip. There is too much reaſon to believe, with reſpect to public Prayer in particular, that many attend it without any view at all to devotion or improvement, only becauſe it is the cuſtom, or for ſome leſs innocent reaſon; and that others, who perhaps are never abſent from it, ſeldom *really* pray, but paſs away the whole ſolemnity of worſhip in a heedleſs and trifling manner, with their thoughts employed

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on buſineſs, or intent on pleaſure and folly. How can perſons, who have any ſenſe of the obligation and importance of Prayer, know themſelves to be thus guilty, without ſeverely reproaching themſelves? Were it not for the influence which the examples of ſuch might have, they would be almoſt as innocent if they were openly irreligious, and never appeared at any place of Divine worſhip.

2dly, We ought to pray with fervency of affection and deſire. This muſt be of particular importance. It cannot be imagined, that any Prayers will be accepted, which are not emanations from a heart charged with good deſires. The juſteſt and beſt definition that can be given of devotion is, "that it is the "affections correſponding to the Divine "nature and character, expreſſing themſelves by their proper acts." As far, therefore, as theſe affections are either wanting or languid, devotion loſes (I may ſay) its ſoul, and degenerates into

a worthleſs formality.———The proper diſpoſitions for Prayer are gratitude and love to God; eſteem and veneration for him; joy and confidence in his goodneſs; a ſenſe of our dependence upon him as the abſolute diſpoſer of our lot; ſorrow for the diſorders of our hearts; humility and ſelf-abaſement; hatred of all ſin; love to virtue as our chief good; and unfeigned benevolence to our fellow-creatures. For the ſame reaſon that we ſhould poſſeſs theſe diſpoſitions at all when we pray, they ſhould be warm and active within us. It is not poſſible that we ſhould then be too much concerned about reviving in ourſelves the beſt ſentiments, and raiſing to the utmoſt every pious affection. Our affections cannot be too intenſe when the Deity is the object of them. It is not poſſible for any Being to honour and love him enough.——We ought never to *think* of him without reverence. With what reverence then ſhould we *pray* to him?—Our hearts indeed here require our ſtricteſt

ſtricteſt care; and after all our labour we ſhall find them much too cold. Every virtuous man laments the weakneſs of his good affections, and the inſenſibility into which he is apt to ſink with reſpect to the moſt intereſting concerns. We are ſurrounded with alluring ſcenes and objects, which ſtrongly ſolicit our attention and engage our paſſions, and which, if we are not watchful, will purſue us to the cloſet and the church, and there cauſe our minds to ſtart aſide, and damp and check them in their aſcent to the Deity. In theſe circumſtances it is encouraging to reflect, that God *remembers we are duſt*, and will accept us, notwithſtanding any infirmities which we endeavour faithfully to correct and remove.

That fervor in Prayer which I am now recommending, is ſo far from being inconſiſtent with the moſt free and perfect exerciſe of our rational powers, that it is its neceſſary effect. The juſter

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views we have of our ſtate, and the more plainly and truly we perceive the dependence of all things upon God, our own ignorance and defects, the importance of virtue and the evil of vice; the more our hearts muſt be impreſſed; the higher our affections muſt riſe; and the more earneſtly we ſhall pant after wiſdom, direction and virtue.——There is, however, a fervor in religious exerciſe which is entirely mechanical, and the effect of nothing but pride and preſumption. Againſt the influence of this we ſhould take care to guard. All inward perſuaſions and tranſports of which we can give no good account; all ſallies of *blind* zeal and affection we ſhould ſuppreſs in ourſelves as deluſive and dangerous. Reaſon ought always to be the governing faculty, and the affections muſt not lead but follow. It will therefore be extremely wrong in any perſon, to judge of his religious character, by the heat and the extaſies he may feel in devotion, without examining into the ſources

ſources of them. —— Though it be in general true, that where the pure love of God and a ſpirit of genuine piety prevail, there will be an unſpeakable ardor and delight in the exerciſes of devotion; and though one reaſon why many religious men do not feel more of this ardor and delight, is the imperfection of their characters; yet it ſhould be remembered, that the only ſafe and infallible way of judging of ourſelves is by our actions *. Every tree muſt be known by its fruits. The nature and degree of inward principles muſt be determined by

* It ſhould be attended to, that the fervency in Prayer which I have in view, is an engagement and ardor of mind, conſiſting in the exerciſe of ſtrong and lively ſentiments of virtue and piety.—There are many good men of cold natural tempers, who may ſeldom be much moved with any thing in the common courſe of *worldly* affairs, and who therefore, in *religion*, may feel little of that paſſionate zeal and heat which others, of warm tempers but poſſibly far leſs reſpectable characters, may feel continually. The rule, therefore, given above ſhould not be forgotten.

by their effects. He is the beſt man who is moſt remarkable for good works. He loves God moſt who is moſt like to him; who maintains in all he thinks and does the moſt ſtrict regard to truth and right, and is the moſt uſeful and kind to his fellow-creatures. The true raptures in religion are thoſe which flow from a conſcience void of offence towards God and man, from a mind thoroughly reconciled to eternal righteouſneſs, and a life ſhining with every Divine grace and virtue. The true ſpirit of devotion prevails moſt, where there is the moſt exemplarineſs of converſation and behaviour; the moſt regular diſcharge of all moral and religious duties; the moſt abſolute reſignation in all events to the Divine will; and the greateſt degrees of meekneſs, patience, candour, charity, and ſelf-government.

3dly, We ought to be conſtant in Prayer; or in the language of ſcripture *to pray always with all manner of prayer and*

and ſupplication in the ſpirit. So many and ſo great are the advantages of Prayer, and of ſuch uſe is it towards guarding us againſt temptations and promoting our conformity to the Divine laws, that it ought to make one of the ſtated employments of our lives. So apt are we to loſe our ſenſe of the moſt important truths, to ſink into a forgetfulneſs of our chief intereſt, and to grow indolent and careleſs amidſt the avocations of buſineſs and pleaſure, that we ought to be often having recourſe to it, reviving by it good impreſſions on our minds, and putting ourſelves into the proper poſture for receiving grace and help from heaven. When this duty is neglected our beſt defence is loſt, our progreſs in virtue ſlackens, and we muſt be in great danger of being carried away with the evil of the world.——As you value then all that is of conſequence to a moral agent, you ought to be *frequent* in Prayer. If you have any ambition to grow in goodneſs,

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you will without doubt be diligent in uſing this beſt means of it. If you have a juſt ſenſe of thoſe mercies with which every moment of your exiſtence is filled, you will be continually ſending up your thankſgivings for them. If you know what ſatisfaction there is in true devotion, or have had any experience of its power to make you more happy and God-like, it will not be in your power to avoid employing yourſelf *often* in it.

There are no particular rules to be given on this head. Every one is here at liberty within certain limits, and muſt regulate himſelf as he finds moſt ſuitable to his temper and circumſtances. I ſhall only ſay, that at leaſt we ought to apply to the purpoſes of devotion ſome portion of time in every day. I ſhould think that no religious perſon can well content himſelf with leſs than this. — Suppoſe, for inſtance, that we made it our practice to devote the greateſt part of an hour every morning or evening to the duties

duties of ſerious recollection, ſelf-examination, and private Prayer; beſides more time on Sundays, and at other extraordinary ſeaſons.——Would there be any thing unreaſonable in this? Would we not find ourſelves abundantly recompenſed for it, by the vigour and alacrity with which it would inſpire us in the ways of righteouſneſs, the heavenly turn it would give to our minds, and the conſtant watchfulneſs and attention to our characters which it would produce? Would we ever have reaſon to reflect, that we had thus taken too much pains to cultivate worthy affections, and to prepare for a better ſtate? Would we repent of ſuch a courſe when we came to die? Would not this and *more* than this be actually our practice, were we ſenſible enough of the infinite importance of religious virtue, or as much in earneſt about it as the children of this world are about pleaſure, gain and honour?

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The great advantages ariſing from ſuch a method of devotion as that now propoſed, have been atteſted to, from their own experience *, by ſome of the wiſeſt and,

* 'Tis related of Dr. *Boerhaave* (in his life by Dr. Brown) that he uſed to devote the firſt hour in every day to meditation and prayer; which, he uſed to ſay, prepared and ſtrengthened him for the following employments of the day.—We are told of the excellent Mr. *Abernethy*, that it appears from his diary, that beſides the daily exerciſes of the cloſet, he frequently ſhut himſelf up the whole day for the ſecret ſervices of devotion. The reaſons he gives for ſpending ſo much time in this way are in his own words theſe—"I apply myſelf to theſe exerciſes, 1ſt, "Becauſe they are a noble employment of the "mind, moſt worthy of its rational powers, tending "to their higheſt perfection, and affording moſt "ſolid joy.—2dly, In ſolemn tranſactions with "God I may hope for ſuch a confirmation in virtuous ſentiments and diſpoſitions, and ſuch "advantages over worldly luſts as may be of great "uſe to me in future life; and this hope is juſtified by experience.—3dly, I would lay ſtricter "obligations on myſelf to greater watchfulneſs and "caution againſt the ſprings of error and perplexity "and guilt, into which I have been formerly miſled."—*See the Account of Mr. Abernethy's Life prefixed to the third Volume of his Sermons*, p. 18.

and beſt men; and there are many now in the world, who would not exchange it, for the moſt proſperous courſe of irreligion that can be imagined.———It is neceſſary to obſerve here, that at the ſame time that we devote ſome part of every day to religious duties, there ſhould always run through the reſt of the day prevailing piety and goodneſs, and a ſpirit of love and humility. In other words; when not actually engaged in Prayer, we ſhould keep ourſelves as much as poſſible in a diſpoſition for it, and ſpeak and act on every occaſion in ſuch a manner, as to ſhew to all about us that we are often engaged in the beſt exerciſes. Happy beyond expreſſion are thoſe who thus *walk with God*; who ſtudy always to *live* in the ſame ſpirit that they *pray*.

I muſt add, that there are many incidental occaſions in life, in which Prayer is peculiarly proper. Such are all occaſions in which we have any weighty affairs under conſideration, or are about

engaging in any important undertakings. Nature and reaſon then ſtrongly prompt us to ſeek the bleſſings of heaven upon our undertakings, and to implore direction and wiſdom from that Being who governs all events. Plato, in a paſſage which has been often quoted *, ſays, that among the Greeks, no one of any diſcretion would ever undertake any thing without firſt invoking the Deity.—Times of trouble and affliction are likewiſe peculiarly proper for Prayer. There is no relief at ſuch times like to that ariſing from pouring out our ſorrows before our Maker, meditating upon them as what he ſees and yet permits, and profeſſing before him our hearty acceptance of them as his will.——When we have in any inſtance been drawn into guilt, it becomes us particularly to confeſs it in his preſence; and to form, under his eye, ſolemn reſolutions to endeavour in future time to be more careful.———Again; when we have received any extraordinary mercies or deliverances, it becomes us particularly to

* *In Timæd ſub initio.*

to acknowledge them.——When we are tempted to any crime, we ought alſo to fly to Prayer as our very beſt ſecurity. There are few temptations which would not loſe their force, if, when they come in our way, we would take time to ſet ourſelves ſeriouſly to this duty. A prayer then offered up with attention would place us under the guardianſhip of heaven, and bring our minds in ſuch a manner under the impreſſions of the motives to virtue, that it would be ſcarcely poſſible for us to deviate from it *.

4thly, In order to render our prayers ſucceſsful, it is abſolutely neceſſary that they ſhould be accompanied with a holy life, and the diligent uſe of our own endeavours to acquire what we pray for. The efficacy of Prayer ariſes from its

* See Mr. *Amory*'s Sermon on the *Advantage of Prayer*; and alſo his *Dialogue on Devotion*.—I would further beg leave here to recommend to every head of a family Mr. *Pickard*'s three Diſcourſes on the *Religious Government of a Family*.

its being the means and fruit of virtue, as well as from its being an immediate act of virtue, or a due acknowledgment of our dependence, and the performance of what is in itſelf fit to be performed. If therefore we ſeparate from it virtuous reſolution and right practice we deſtroy its value, and make it much worſe than what ſome think it muſt always be, "an inſignificant form or cere-"mony." *A wicked man's prayers are an abomination to the Lord. If we regard iniquity in our hearts, it is certain he will not hear us.* As a righteous life without Prayer implies a contradiction, Prayer being one eſſential part of right practice*: So Prayer without a righteous life is impiety and profaneneſs. What an inſult, for inſtance, on the Deity would it be to aſk of him the pardon of thoſe offences which we deſign to

* Imo vero audacter affirmare poſſum eum qui ſine ſinceris ad deum precationibus virtutem ſectatur, nunquam illam poſſe aſſequi, ſed evanidam duntaxat aliquam illius umbram et inane imitamentum. *Dr. More's Enchirid. Ethicum.*

to repeat; to thank him for thoſe benefits which we employ in rebellion againſt him; or to implore his bleſſing on any of our *unlawful* undertakings? What a mockery of him would it be to ſeek wiſdom and happineſs from him, and at the ſame time to neglect the appointed means for obtaining them; to pray not to be led into temptation, and at the ſame time to put ourſelves into the way of it; or to bring with us into His preſence any ſecret vice or favourite paſſion to which we are determined his authority ſhall not extend?——If then we would have our prayers ſucceſsful we muſt reſolve to abandon all iniquity: They muſt be aſſiſted by good works, and render us through our whole conduct more amiable and worthy.

I have before more than once touched upon what I am now obſerving; but it is of ſo much importance that it cannot be too often repeated, or too much inculcated. I muſt therefore be excuſed

for inſiſting here ſtill further upon it. ———There are, certainly, no perſons who deſerve more of our deteſtation, than thoſe who reſt in the external ſervices of religion, without endeavouring to accompany them with ſuitable actions in common life. It is melancholy to find in all religious ſocieties ſo many of theſe hypocrites; men who ſhew no concern about going further than the *form of godlineſs*, and yet look upon themſelves as the only favourites of heaven. They are conſtant in Prayer: But it does not mend their tempers or ſubdue their paſſions. They will not break the ſabbath or omit a ſacrament: But they will practice cunning and deceit, and ſpeak evil of their neighbours. At church they are all ſerioufneſs and ſanctity. In their families they are *tyrants*, and in their ſhops, *cheats*. Like the Phariſees of old *they tithe mint, aniſe and cummin*; but they *neglect the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and fidelity* *. Their faith

* Matt. xxiii. 23.

faith is uncharitableneſs, and their zeal pride and rancour.——Oh! wretched men! How can you avoid knowing that you are ſubſtituting the means for the end, and that the moſt profligate ſinners will enter into the kingdom of heaven before you?——Offences of this kind will come. But woe be to thoſe by whom they come. At the univerſal reckoning they will plead: "*Lord, Lord, have we not propheſied in* "*thy name, and eat and drank at thy* "*table?* Have we not offered up many "a prayer, kept many a faſt, and been "zealous for thy cauſe?" But we are aſſured that the anſwer they ſhall receive will be: *I never knew you. Depart from me, ye that work iniquity* *.

It has before been ſhewn at large, that Prayer has the greateſt tendency to make us in every reſpect better. In proportion to the degree of this tendency, muſt be the peculiar guilt of thoſe in whom it does not take effect. Such are wicked

* Matt. vii. 22.——Luke xiii. 25, 26, 27.

in oppoſition to ſtronger motives and obligations than others; and therefore ſhew greater depravity of character. They do unſpeakable harm; and that ſpurious piety in which they truſt is indeed worſe than atheiſm.——Are you a religious man? Tremble at the thoughts of ſuch guilt. Remember, that your principal work is to be done after you have been preſent at religious exerciſes. Shew to all about you that religion is lovely and happy, the inſpirer of hope and joy, and the parent of all excellent qualities and noble actions.—You make conſcience, I will ſuppoſe, of *ſtatedly* retiring for ſerious recollection and prayer. Nothing can be more reaſonable; nothing more important. But how do you act in the intermediate times? Do you leave your retirements with ſweeter diſpoſitions and firmer purpoſes to be and do all that is generous and worthy? Are you afterwards more humble and meek, more candid and ſincere, more watchful over your life,

and

and fuller of love and kindneſs to mankind?——This, without doubt, ought to be the effect of your devotions; and if they have not this effect; or if, on the contrary, they only render you more proud and diſagreeable and leſs uſeful as a member of ſociety, from a notion that they will be accepted as compenſations for deficiencies in moral duties; as far as this is true, your prayers are a curſe to you, and your religion is nothing but an execrable and deſtructive ſuperſtition. ——————I muſt not omit to obſerve.

5thly, That we ought to pray and give thanks in the name of Chriſt. Thus are we directed in the New Teſtament. John xvi. 23. *Verily I ſay unto you, whatſoever ye ſhall aſk the Father in my name, he ſhall give it you.* Epheſ. v. 20. *Giving thanks always for all things to God in the name of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt.* Col. iii. 17. *Whatſoever ye do in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jeſus.* The meaning of this is; that

that we ought, in our religious ſervices and all our actions, to maintain a regard to the relations in which Chriſt ſtands to us, and to conſider ourſelves as his followers.——Nothing can be more reaſonable than this. The relations in which we ſtand to Chriſt are of the greateſt importance. A regard to them, and a compliance with the duties reſulting from them are a neceſſary part of goodneſs, and an indiſpenſible condition of favour to all, as far as they have been made known. If Chriſt is indeed what the ſcriptures ſay, *the way, the truth and the life*; *the propitiation for our ſins*; our Deliverer from death, and the Saviour and Judge of the world, it is fit that he ſhould be recognized in theſe characters, and that our prayers ſhould be offered up under a ſenſe of them. It cannot be excuſable to treat with neglect that name to which we owe our proſpect of a bleſſed immortality, and at which *every knee is commanded to bow of things in heaven and things in earth and*

and things under the earth, to the glory of God the Father *. The inconceivable benefits which we receive by Chriſt's miniſtry, and the high ſtation to which he is exalted for the good of mankind, afford us the nobleſt foundation for joy and hope, and the warmeſt admiration of Divine goodneſs. It would be wrong to forget theſe at any time; but it muſt be particularly ſo to forget them when engaged in the duties of devotion.

It may not be improper here to make a few obſervations on the *matter* and *compoſition* of Prayer, as the due regulation of theſe has a conſiderable tendency to render it a more profitable ſervice.——With reſpect to the *matter* of Prayer; what requires moſt to be remembered is, that we ought never, except with great caution, to pray for any particular worldly advantages. The reaſon is obvious. We cannot ſay what advantages of this kind are fit for us, or moſt

* Phil. ii. 10, 11.

moſt conducive to our true intereſt. Thoſe comforts, ſucceſſes, and gratifications which we may be ready moſt eagerly to deſire, may be entirely improper to be granted us; or, if granted us, might perhaps prove pernicious to us. And, on the contrary, thoſe ſufferings which we may be moſt apt to ſhrink from and to deprecate, may in reality be uſeful to us, and prove, on the whole, the greateſt benefits. —— Virtue alone is what we certainly know to be good for us. This either implies in it, or will draw after it, all that is important to a reaſonable Being. It is the true riches, the nobleſt treaſure, the higheſt honour, and God's beſt and choiceſt gift. If we *have* this, it ſignifies nothing what we *want*. If we *want* this, it ſignifies nothing what we *have*. To the acquiſition of this, therefore, and our improvement in it, ought all our prayers to be directed. — I hope it will not be ſaid that this being placed in our own power, we have no reaſon

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for any applications to God for it, but ought to ſeek it entirely from ourſelves. Such a ſentiment cannot eaſily be entertained by any who have a due ſenſe of their own frailties, or due apprehenſions of the Deity, as the author of all good and the ruler of all events, *of whom, and through whom, and to whom are all things.*——Is any man truly virtuous? And has he no reaſon to praiſe God on this account? May he venture to declare that he owes it not in any way to God? Was it not in conſequence of the Divine will and direction, that he was brougnt into thoſe circumſtances, and had thoſe views of things laid before his mind, which have produced this happy effect? Is there no reaſon to think that there have been many good men in the world who, had their circumſtances been in the leaſt different from what they were, had one incident in their lives never happened, or had any ſmaller ſhare of advantages been granted them, would have continued in the num-

ber of the careleſs and irreligious, and been loſt for ever *?

With

* "It is God who has made the mind of man "capable of perceiving motives, and of being wrought "upon by him. It is God who, in the courſe of "his Providence, has preſented ſuch a train of "motives to any one's mind, as has engaged him "to practiſe all the virtues of a holy life. To "God, therefore, the praiſe of it is to be given." *Dr. Leechman's excellent Sermon on Prayer, p.* 112.

Nothing can be more ſtrong than what many heathen writers have ſaid on this ſubject. Μεγας ο αγων, θειον τα εργον, υπερ βασιλειας, υπερ ελευθεριας. Τυ Θευ μεμνησο; επικαλυ βοηθον και παρασατην, ως τυς Διοσκυρυς εν χειμωνι οι πλεοντες. Ποιος γαρ μειζων χειμων η ο εκ φαντασιων ισχυρων και εκπρεπτικων τυ λογυ. Arriani Epict. Lib. II. Chap. 18 "Great is the conflict, "divine the enterprize; for a kingdom, for liber-"ty, for tranquillity. Remember God. Call upon "him, for aid, as mariners do on Caſtor and Pollux "in a ſtorm: For what greater ſtorm is there than "that ariſing from violent paſſions claſhing with "reaſon?——Εκ της διανοιας εκβαλε λυπην, φοβον, επιθυμιαν, &c. Ταυτα δ' υκ εστιν αλλως εκβαλειν ει μη προς μονον τον Θεον αποβλεποντα, εκεινω μονω προσπεπονθοτα, προς εκεινυ προσταγμασι καθωσι ωμενον. "Grief, fear, deſire, &c. cannot be other-"wiſe

With reſpect to the *compoſition* of Prayer we may obſerve, that it ought to

"wiſe conquered than by looking to God alone, and relying upon him." Ib. Lib. II. Chap. 16. ——Again; Lib. IV. Chap. 4. Haſt thou overcome thy luſt or thy anger? Ποσω μειζων αιτια θυσιας η υπατειας, η υπαρχια. Ταυτα εκ σε αυτε γινεται και απο των Θεων. "How much greater "reaſon for a ſacrifice is this than a conſulſhip or "procuratorſhip? For this proceeds from thyſelf "and from God."——Excellent alſo to the preſent purpoſe are the words of *Hierocles* in his Commentary on *Pythagoras's* Golden Verſes, verſe 48. Ουτε γαρ μονον προθυμειδαι δι τα παλα, ως εφ εαυτοις ονια κατορθωσαι, και χωρις τε Θεε συνεργειας; ατε ψιλης της ευχης, &c. "We ought neither to purſue virtue, "as if it was in our own power to acquire it, with-"out the help of God; nor to content ourſelves "with mere prayer, without uſing our own endea-"vours to acquire what we pray for. This will be "either to make our virtue impious, or our prayers "unſucceſsful. But impiety deſtroys the eſſence of "virtue; and inaction, the efficacy of prayer."—Plato (in Meno) after he had endeavoured to prove that men have not virtue (perhaps he means chiefly political or public virtue) either from nature or inſtruction, concludes that it muſt be a Divine communication; and obſerves, that for this reaſon virtuous men

to be plain, ſerious and ſimple. Nothing can be more contemptible than an

men have been juſtly called *divine*. Εκ μεν τοινυν τουτου τε λογισμε, ω μενων, θεια μοιρα ημιν φαινεται παραγιγνομενη η αρετη οις παραγιγνεται.——
—To the ſame purpoſe ſpeaks *Seneca*. *Bonus vir ſine Deo nemo eſt*. An poteſt aliquis ſupra fortunam, niſi ab illo adjuſtus, exſurgere? Ille dat conſilia magnifica et erecta. In unoquoque virorum bonorum (quis Deus incertum eſt) habitat Deus. Epiſt. 41. "No perſon is virtuous without God. How "can any one riſe above fortune, unleſs aſſiſted by "him. It is he gives great and noble deſigns."—— *Ita dico, Lucili, ſacer intra nos ſpiritus habitat, bonorum malorumque noſtrorum obſervator et cuſtos. Hic prout a nobis tractatus eſt, ita nos ipſe tractat*. Ibid. "There "dwells within us a holy ſpirit who obſerves and "watches our good and bad deeds, and who treats "us as he is himſelf treated by us."——*Multos et noſtra civitas et Græcia tulit ſingulares viros; quorum neminem, niſi juvante Deo, talem fuiſſe credendum eſt*. "Both our city and Greece, ſays Cicero, have pro-"duced many extraordinary men; none of whom, "we ought to believe, could be what they "were without God's help."——*Nemo vir magnus ſine aliquo Divino afflatu unquam fuit*. De Nat. Deorum, L. II. 66.——The ſubject of Maximus Tyrius's 2d Diſſertation is this queſtion; "whether "a good

an affected diſplay of eloquence in this duty, quaint phraſes, ſtudied antitheſes, vain

"a good man is ſuch in virtue of a Divine communi-
"cation or not." He maintains the affirmative, and obſerves that God ought to be much more acknowledged the giver of virtue than of arts and ſciences, or any temporal bleſſings; this being the beſt and greateſt good, and therefore what he muſt be moſt ready to communicate. Men, he ſays on account of the infirmities of their natures, need the influence of an aſſiſting and co-operating Deity to lead them to virtue. Δεονται συναγωνιςε Θεε και συλληπτορος της βοπης και χειραγωγιας. The life of Socrates, he, ſays Diſſ. 30. was full of prayer. Ην ο Βιος Σοκρατες μεςος ευχης. But the things he prayed for were not riches and power, but a virtuous mind, a quiet life, unblemiſhed manners, and a death full of hope, which are glorious gifts, and ſuch as the gods beſtow. Αρετην ψυχης και ησιχιαν Βιε και Ζοην αμεμπτον και ευελπιν θανατον τα θαυμαςα δωρα, τα θεοις δοτα.——"As for "the gods, who has told thee that they cannot help "us in thoſe things which they have put in our "own power? Whether it be ſo or not thou ſhalt "ſoon perceive, if thou wilt but try and pray." *Marc. Antoni.* L. IX. S. 40.——"It is the duty of "all who are endowed with reaſon to aſk all good "things of the gods; particularly the knowledge

vain tautologies, a redundancy of language, or impertinent excurſions into matters

" of themſelves, for there is nothing greater that " man can receive or God beſtow." Παντα μεν δει ταγαθα τους νουν εχοντας αιτεισθαι παρα των θεων; μαλιστα δε της περι αυτων επιστημης, &c. Pluta. de Iſide et Oſiride initio.

Some of theſe paſſages, at the ſame time that they ſhew us what the beſt antient philoſophers thought of our dependence on the Deity for the acquiſition of virtue, prove likewiſe that they thought very highly of the reaſonableneſs and importance of prayer. But I ſhall beg leave to take occaſion here to produce a few more paſſages in order to prove this.

" To worſhip the gods and to pray to them, " ſays *Plato*, is above all things fit, decent, beautiful " and conducive to a happy life." *Plat. de Leg.* L. IV. " —In the 12th book of laws (Sub fine) he obſerves, " that it is above all things proper, that none but ſuch " as underſtand and venerate and practice religion " ſhould be choſen magiſtrates, or be held in eſteem " on account of their virtue."——In another of his Dialogues he obſerves to the ſame purpoſe, that it ſhould not be thought, that there is any part of human virtue of greater weight, than religion or piety towards the Deity. *Epin.* Sub fine.—*Cicero* (in Offic. Lib. I. Cap. ult.) places in the firſt rank of duties thoſe we owe to God: And he obſerves that to deſtroy piety

matters of controverſy and ſpeculation, as if our deſign was to ſhew the Deity who

piety and religion is to introduce confuſion into human life, and to ſubvert all ſocial duties. *De Nat.* L. I. n. 2.—*Marcus Antoninus* aſſerts that the ſoul of man was made for godlineſs no leſs than for juſtice, and that the former is the proper ground and ſpring of the latter. *De rebus Suis.* Lib. XI. S. 18. ——The chief article of the unwritten law mentioned by *Socrates* (in Xenoph. Mem. L. IV. C. IV. S. 19.) is, that the gods ought to be worſhipped. This, he ſays, is acknowledged every where; and received by all men as the firſt command. Παρα πασιν ανθρωποις πρωτον νομιζεται, τους Θεους σεβειν. —Piety, ſays *Hieracles*, is the chief and the parent of all the virtues, and the contempt of piety the cauſe of all vice. In *Carm. Pythag.* Verſ. 1. 17.—If you ſearch the world, ſays *Plutarch*, you may find cities without walls, without letters, without kings, without money; but no one ever ſaw a city without a Deity, without a temple, or without prayers. *Plut. adverſus Coloten.*——He concludes his treatiſe on ſuperſtition with obſerving, "that thoſe who, "forſaking that piety which lies in the middle, run "into *irreligion* to avoid *ſuperſtition*, act like a perſon "who to avoid a wild beaſt, or a fire, ſhould run "among pits and precipices."——But there would be no end of quoting paſſages of this kind.

how finely we can talk, or how much we know.—I have now in my view *public* Prayer only. In *private* Prayer it is not to be ſuppoſed that any one can fall into theſe abſurdities and indecencies. Here a truly devout heart will often find itſelf above the uſe of words. And in general

Nothing is more certain than that religion has been held in the higheſt veneration among all civilized nations, and particularly among the wiſe Greeks and Romans. "Our city, (ſays *Valerius Maximus*, of Rome. Lib. I. Cap. 1.) has always held every "thing to be of inferior value to religion."—It is impoſſible to think of this without being ſurpriſed at that diſregard to religion which prevails at preſent in this kingdom. Has it indeed been diſcovered that the wiſdom of all ages has been deceived in this inſtance, and that piety is no part of a good character? One would think that this muſt be the caſe; for it is not eaſy, on any other ſuppoſition, to account for that tranquillity and ſatisfaction with which, not merely the vulgar and illiterate, but many ſenſible and in other reſpects virtuous men, ſeem to live in the neglect of religious duties. It is plain, however, that the epithet *heatheniſh* has been very improperly applied to ſuch perſons, for it appears that Heathens thought and practiſed very differently.

general it will, perhaps, be right in private Prayer to ſuffer ourſelves to be guided by our feelings and affections, and the preſent ſtate of our circumſtances, without tying ourſelves down to any particular forms.

I might go on to give an account of the *means* of acquiring a true ſpirit of devotion, and of improving in it; and alſo to point out the *hindrances* of it. —— The principal helps to devotion are, the uninterrupted practice of it with ſincerity; cloſe and frequent meditation on our own wants, and on the Divine nature and attributes; the diligent diſcharge of every *other* duty of life; an ardent love of virtue and zeal to grow in it; and a heart lifted above ſenſible objects, and warmed with benevolent wiſhes and worthy ſentiments.—— The chief enemies to devotion are, vanity and diſſipation of mind; the love of pleaſure; the deceitfulneſs of riches; gloomy notions of the Deity; inatten-

tion to religious truths; careleſſneſs in cultivating good affections; and the indulgence of known guilt. A heart filled with the cares of life, and ſtrongly attached to worldly pleaſures, profits and honours, cannot aſcend to heaven, or riſe to clear views and a calm contemplation of Spiritual and Divine objects. The fire of luſt, of ambition, or reſentment will ſoon put out that of devotion. A ſoul conſcious of demerit and deformity, burdened with a ſenſe of guilt, and unable to reſolve upon a preſent and thorough amendment muſt be averſe to the Deity, and to all religious duties.——It is our duty to labour more and more to remove theſe hindrances of our religious improvement, to make uſe of every method in our power to cheriſh a devout temper, and to throw off all low cares, all irregular deſires and perplexing paſſions, that our ſouls may turn themſelves with greater eaſe and alacrity to the author of their exiſtence and their only

happineſs.——But after all that we can do, innumerable imperfections muſt cleave to our beſt exerciſes in the preſent ſtate. How reviving is the proſpect of a better ſtate, where we ſhall loſe all our preſent infirmities, and nothing damp the extaſies of our ſpirits; where we *ſhall ſee God face to face*, ſerve him without wearineſs, and be happy in him for ever?

To ſum up and conclude the whole.——Wretched is the man who lives as without God in the world. Let all who would be happy remember what danger they muſt be in, not only from crimes they *commit*, but from any known duties which they *neglect*. Let them conſider that according to the repreſentation in *Matth.* xxvth, many will hereafter be condemned, not for being *actively vicious*, but for being *unprofitable*; not for *waſting* their talents, but for *not improving* them; not for any harm they have *done*, but for *good* they have *not done*. Of all the omiſſions

which we can be guilty of, one of the moſt unwarrantable and fatal is the omiſſion of devotion. To want *piety* is to want the ſureſt foundation of all excellent qualities, and to break that which our Lord calls, the *firſt and great commandment of the law**. No worſe blindneſs or calamity can happen to a rational creature.———What ſhould we think of a perſon who ſhould never addreſs himſelf, in a way of acknowledgment and reſpect, to another perſon upon whom he was dependent, and to whom he owed all his happineſs? Would not ſuch a one ſhew a temper void of all gratitude and ingenuity? ———What an injury is it to our minds to refuſe opening them to heavenly light and grace; to ſhut out of them the nobleſt ſentiments; and to remain regardleſs

* Matt. xxii. 37. *Thou ſhalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy ſoul. This is the firſt and great commandment. And the ſecond is like unto it; thou ſhalt love thy neighbour as thyſelf. On theſe two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.*

regardleſs of the infinite Deity, though always ſoliciting our attention and working within and without us; though ſurrounded with his glory, dependent every moment on his power, and maintained by his goodneſs?——Can *he* be qualified for the worſhip of ſuperior Beings in the manſions of the bleſſed, who never worſhips here below? Can *he* poſſeſs true goodneſs who forgets the fountain of all good, and omits a fundamental *part* and important *means* of goodneſs?——Even the beſt men, with all the aid which they derive from religious duties, find it difficult to keep their minds in tolerable order, and to maintain themſelves in tranquillity and purity? What then muſt be the condition of thoſe who pay no regard to theſe duties? In what confuſion muſt their minds lie? Into what a deſart muſt their characters run? How unprepared muſt they be for ſickneſs and death?—We are often ſeeing that thoſe who have neglected Prayer in life, fly to it with eagerneſs in death. They then ſend for miniſters

miniſters to pray with them, and expect, perhaps, that encouragement and comfort ſhould be given them. But what comfort can be given them? He that now paſſes his days without Prayer, in vain will he fly to it when he comes to die. The happineſs of another world is promiſed to a *holy life*, not to a *penitent death*.——Let us then, while in health, apply ourſelves to the moſt neceſſary duties, and endeavour always to be ſo devout and diligent as we ſhall ſoon wiſh we had been.——In a little time this world will be no more to us; the curtain will drop between us and all mortal ſcenes; the ſolemn events which we are often hearing of, and which we are apt to ſee at a great diſtance, will overtake and amaze us; religion and eternity will appear to us in their juſt importance, and nothing will prove of any advantage to us except the good we now do, and the habits of virtue and piety which we poſſeſs. Let us take care to bear this in mind amidſt all our engage-

ments

ments and purſuits. Let us ſtrive to acquire that ſpirit of true piety which will aſſimilate us to the Deity, and eſtabliſh our ſouls in peace and reſignation and a ſuperiority to defiling paſſions. Let us do all in our power, by our example and influence, to revive the credit of religion, and to remove the prejudices which prevail againſt it. Theſe prejudices, as far as they proceed from the dreadful effects of the corruptions of religion, are indeed in the higheſt degree unreaſonable: for no one can be ignorant, that what is moſt uſeful and valuable becomes in all caſes the moſt pernicious when corrupted. But the inexcuſableneſs of theſe prejudices affords no reaſon for being more remiſs in endeavouring to remove them. Did religion appear, in the tempers and lives of all who profeſs it, to be that joyful and divine thing which it really is, every objection to it would vaniſh, and it would ſoon force univerſal reverence and admiration.—But I feel myſelf in danger of being too tedious.

In

In the latter part of this diſſertation I have endeavoured to ſhew in what manner we ought to pray. I have inſiſted particularly on our obligation to pray with minds duly prepared; with fervency, frequency and perſeverance; with univerſal virtue in our lives; in the faithful uſe of the means for acquiring what we pray for, and as the followers of Jeſus Chriſt, who through him look for a reſurrection from death to the enjoyment of endleſs life and happineſs. —How delightful and improving muſt ſuch devotion be? How mighty its power to refine and exalt our ſouls? How unutterable the ſweetneſs of a life thus ſpent? How noble an act of mind is a prayer thus offered up with ſimplicity and humility, with collected thoughts, a pure heart, aſſured hope, warm affections, and in the lively exerciſe of all worthy ſentiments? *Does any man lack wiſdom*, or any thing good for him? *Let him in this manner aſk it of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and it*

*ſhall be given him**. Nothing can happen amiſs to ſuch a perſon. He has an almighty friend to confide in, who hears him at all times, is engaged in his defence, and will diſtinguiſh him eternally and infinitely from the irreligious and profane.

* James i. 5.

DISSERTATION III.

ON

The Reaſons for expecting that virtuous Men ſhall meet after Death in a State of Happineſs.

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NO perſon who ever makes any ſerious reflections, can avoid wiſhing earneſtly to be ſatisfied, Whether there is a future ſtate? And if there is, What expectations he ought to entertain with reſpect to it, and by what means his happineſs in it muſt be ſecured?——— There are many arguments which lead us to conclude, in anſwer to the firſt of theſe queſtions, that we are indeed deſigned for another ſtate. And there are alſo many which at the ſame time prove, that the practice of virtue muſt be our beſt ſecurity in all events, and the moſt

likely method to ſecure happineſs through every poſſible future period of our duration. True goodneſs is the image of the Deity in our ſouls; and it is not conceivable that it ſhould not recommend us to his particular regard, or that thoſe who practiſe it ſhould not be always ſafeſt and happieſt. On the ſuppoſition of a future world, nothing offers itſelf more unavoidably to our thoughts, than the notion, that it will be a ſtate in which preſent inequalities will be ſet right, and a ſuitable diſtinction made between good and bad men.——It muſt however be owned, that this ſubject, as it appears to the eye of unaſſiſted reaſon, is involved in much darkneſs. That in the future ſtate all men ſhall receive an *adequate retribution*, we may in general *know*; but, had we nothing to guide us beſides natural light, we could not go much further on any ſure grounds, or give a ſatisfactory reply to ſeveral very intereſting inquiries.

The

The conſideration, particularly, of ourſelves as *guilty creatures*, would raiſe doubts in our minds; and theſe doubts would not be leſſened but increaſed by reflecting, that under the divine government, happineſs is connected with virtue, and puniſhment with vice. The fact, that virtue will be rewarded, does not by any means determine what ſuch virtue as ours may expect. The virtuous among mankind are to be conſidered as *penitent ſinners*, and what peculiar treatment the caſes of ſuch may require, or how far repentance might avail to break the connection eſtabliſhed by the divine laws between ſin and miſery, would not, I think, be clear to us.——Here then the aid of the chriſtian revelation comes in moſt ſeaſonably, and gives us the moſt agreeable information. It furniſhes us with a certain proof from fact of a future ſtate, and ſhews to our ſenſes the *path of life* in the reſurrection and aſcenſion of *Jeſus Chriſt*. It *aſſures* us, that repentance will be available to our

complete ſalvation, and that all virtuous men ſhall be rewarded with a bleſſed and glorious IMMORTALITY. At the ſame time, it teaches us to conſider this as the effect, not of the ordinary laws of the divine government, but of a particular interpoſition in our favour, and a love to man in *Jeſus Chriſt* which *paſſes knowledge.*

But it is not my preſent purpoſe to inſiſt on theſe things. The reality of a future ſtate, as it is diſcoverable by reaſon, and as it has been confirmed and explained by the chriſtian revelation, muſt be now taken for granted. The deſign of this diſcourſe is only to offer a few thoughts on one particular queſtion relating to it, which, though not of the *higheſt*, is yet of *ſome* conſequence. I mean the queſtion, "How far we have "reaſon to expect, that we ſhall here- "after be reſtored to an acquaintance "with one another, or again ſee and "know one another."

There

There are probably but few who have felt what it is to be deprived by death of perſons they loved, whoſe thoughts have not been a good deal employed on this point. What, on ſuch occaſions, we muſt deſire *chiefly* to know is, that our friends are happy; but it is unavoidable to inquire further concerning them with ſome anxiety, whether we are likely ever to ſee them again. It would be diſmal to think of a departed friend or relative, that "He is gone from us for "ever, that he exiſts no more to us." But virtuous men have no reaſon for any ſuch apprehenſions; and one of the unſpeakable comforts attending the belief of a future ſtate, ariſes from the hope it gives of having our friendſhips perpetuated, and being re-united in happier regions to thoſe whom we have loved and honoured here.——I am well ſatisfied that this is a very rational hope; and in order to ſhew that it is ſo, I ſhall beg leave to offer the following obſervations.

Let it be conſidered firſt, what effect our future recollection of thoſe who are now dear to us, is likely to have upon us.———We have great reaſon to believe, that all the ſcenes of this life will, in the future life, be preſented to our memories, and that we ſhall then recover the greateſt part, if not the whole of our preſent conſciouſneſs. The ſcriptures teach us this in a very ſtriking manner.———It is not therefore to be doubted, but that we ſhall hereafter have a diſtinct remembrance of our virtuous friends and kindred; and this remembrance, one would think, muſt be attended with ſome revival of particular regard, and have a tendency to draw us to one another, as far as it will be poſſible or proper.———It will, I know, be objected to this, that our attachments to relations and friends are derived from inſtincts which have been planted in us to carry on the purpoſes of the preſent ſtate, and which muſt ceaſe intirely hereafter. This is, undoubtedly, in ſome degree

degree true. Every inſtinctive determination which reſpects only the exigencies of the preſent life, will ceaſe with it. But does it follow from hence, that we are likely hereafter to be left as indifferent to thoſe who are now our relations and friends, as if we had never known them? This would be a very wrong concluſion. The natures of things render it ſcarcely conceivable, that the recollection of thoſe valuable perſons with whom we now have connections, (of valuable parents, for example, who had the care of us in our firſt years, and have brought us up to virtue and happineſs,) ſhould not, in every future period of our duration, endear their memory to us, and give us a particular *preference* of them, and inclination to ſeek their ſociety. Many of the diſtinctions, which we make in our regards between ſome and others, are derived from reaſon and neceſſity; and this ſeems to be the caſe in the preſent inſtance.——We are, perhaps, apt ſometimes to carry our

notions too far of the difference between what we now are, and what we ſhall be in the next ſtage of our being. It would be abſurd to ſuppoſe, that we ſhall hereafter want all particular deſires and propenſities. Benevolence, curioſity, ſelf-love, the deſire of honour, and moſt of our more noble and generous affections, will not decreaſe but grow as the perfection of our intellectual nature grows: And even our preſent ſocial *inſtincts* may leave effects on our tempers which may produce an everlaſting union of ſouls, and lay the foundation of ſentiments and deſires which ſhall never be loſt.

But theſe obſervations, I am ſenſible, are not directly to the preſent purpoſe. What affords the plaineſt evidence on this ſubject, is the following conſideration.—— There is great reaſon to believe that virtuous men, as beings of the ſame ſpecies who have begun exiſtence in the ſame circumſtances, and been trained up to virtue in the ſame ſtate of trial and diſcipline,

diſcipline, will be hereafter placed in the ſame common manſions of felicity. It is groundleſs and unnatural to imagine, that after paſſing through this life, they will be removed to different worlds, or ſcattered into different regions of the univerſe. The language of the ſcriptures ſeems plainly and expreſly to determine the contrary. They acquaint us, that mankind are to be raiſed from the dead *together*, and to be judged *together*; and that the righteous, after the general reſurrection and judgment, are to be taken together to the ſame heavenly ſtate, there to live and reign with Chriſt, and to ſhare in his dignity and happineſs. When, in the epiſtle to the Hebrews, (chap. xii. 22, 23, 24.) we are ſaid, in conſequence of the clear diſcoveries made by the goſpel of a future ſtate, to be, as it were, already come to the *city of the living God, to an innumerable company of Angels, to the general aſſembly and church of the firſt-born, and to the ſpirits of juſt men made perfect:*

it

it is plainly implied, that we are to join the general aſſembly of juſt men and of angels in the realms of light, and to be fixed in the ſame manſions with them.

The ſtate of future reward is frequently, in the New Teſtament, deſcribed under the notion of a city, that is, a community or ſociety. It is likewiſe very often called a *kingdom*; the *kingdom of God*, and the *everlaſting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jeſus Chriſt.* The great end of Chriſt's coming into the world was to lay the foundation of this kingdom by ſaving men from the effects of guilt, delivering them from death, and uniting the virtuous part of them under one perfect and everlaſting government in the heavens. It is ſaid of the true diſciples of Chriſt, that * *becauſe he lives, they ſhall live alſo*; that they ſhall hereafter *appear with him in glory*; that he is now *entered for him into heaven as their forerunner*; that he is there *preparing*

* John.

ing a place for them, and that he will ſoon *come again to take them to himſelf, that where he is, there they may be alſo, beholding his glory.* This account is utterly inconſiſtent with the ſuppoſition, that thoſe who ſhall partake of the future reward of virtue are to be diſperſed into different parts of the univerſe, and ſcarcely leaves us any room to doubt on the preſent queſtion. For, is it poſſible, that we ſhould be happy hereafter in the ſame ſeats of joy, under the ſame perfect government, and as members of the ſame heavenly ſociety, and yet remain ſtrangers to one another? Shall we be together with Chriſt, and yet not with one another? Or ſhall we loſe one another in *that multitude which cannot be numbered* *, of thoſe who have been reſcued by him from deſtruction, and who will follow him to his everlaſting kingdom? Being in the ſame happy ſtate with our preſent virtuous friends and relatives, Will they not be acceſſible to us? And if acceſſible, Shall we not fly to them, and

* Rev. vii, 9,

and mingle hearts and ſouls again?—I am very ſenſible, that a great deal of what the ſcriptures ſay of the future ſtate is accommodated to our preſent imperfect ideas, and muſt not be underſtood too literally. But if, in the preſent inſtance, it means any thing, it muſt mean as much as implies what I am pleading for.

In order to give ſome further evidence on this point, it will not be amiſs to deſire that the following paſſages of ſcripture may be attended to.—The Theſſalonians, a little before St. Paul wrote his firſt epiſtle to them, had, it ſeems, loſt ſome of their friends by death. In theſe circumſtances, he exhorts them not to *ſorrow like others who had no hope*, becauſe they might conclude certainly, from the death and reſurrection of Jeſus, that thoſe who *had ſlept in him, God would hereafter bring with him.* He tells them *by the word of the Lord*, or, as from immediate revelation, that a period was coming

coming when Chriſt would deſcend from heaven *with a ſhout, with the voice of the arch-angel, and with the trump of God*; and when the friends they had loſt ſhould be raiſed from the dead, and, together with themſelves, *ſhould be caught up to meet the Lord in the air, and to live for ever with him.* 1 Theſſ. iv. 13, 14, &c.——But what I have in view is more diſtinctly aſſerted in the 2d chapter of this epiſtle, verſe 19th. *For what is our hope, our joy, our crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the preſence of our Lord Jeſus at his coming?*———It is moſt plainly implied in theſe words, that the apoſtle expected to ſee and know again his Theſſalonian converts at Chriſt's ſecond coming. The ſame remark may be made on his words in 2 Cor. iv. 14. *knowing, that he which raiſed up the Lord Jeſus, ſhall raiſe us up alſo by Jeſus, and preſent us with you.* And alſo in 2 Cor. i. 14. *As you have acknowledged us in part that we are your rejoicing, even ſo ye alſo are ours in the day of the Lord Jeſus.*

Having

Having made theſe obſervations to ſhew, that we may with reaſon entertain the expectation of joining one another hereafter; I ſhall now beg leave to give myſelf free ſcope in imagining and repreſenting the happineſs with which it will be attended.——It is ſcarcely poſſible for any perſon not to look upon this, as one moſt agreeable circumſtance in the future ſtate of felicity. It has a tendency to render the contemplation of another world much more delightful. The hope of it riſes up unavoidably in our minds, and has generally, if not always *, accompanied the belief of a future exiſtence. Nor does there appear the leaſt reaſon why we ſhould heſitate here a moment, or refuſe falling in readily with the natural and common apprehenſions

* *O præclarum diem, cum ad illud divinum animorum concilium cœtumque proficiſcar; cumque ex hac turba et colluvione diſcedam! Proficiſcar enim non ad eos ſolum viros de quibus ante dixi, ſed etiam ad catonem meum, quo nemo vir melior natus eſt, nemo pietate præſtantior*, &c. Cicer. de Senectute.

henſions of mankind. Without dwelling therefore any longer on the evidence for this point, let us recollect ſome of the particular circumſtances which will contribute towards rendering the future junction of virtuous men joyful.

One of theſe circumſtances will be the remembrance of their preſent connections with one another. For *men* to meet *men* in the heavenly ſociety; for beings to join one another hereafter, who have begun their exiſtence on the ſame planet, felt the ſame fears, and undergone the ſame diſcipline, muſt be the cauſe of pleaſure. What then will it be for *friends* to meet *friends*, and *kindred* to meet *kindred?* What will it be, after obtaining a complete conqueſt over death, to be reſtored to thoſe who are now dear to us as our own ſouls, and to whoſe example and inſtructions we are, perhaps, indebted for the higheſt bleſſings? With what delight will the pious parent meet his children, the huſband the wife, and the

maſter his family? How will many good men, now of oppoſite ſentiments, rejoice to ſee one another in bliſs, and to find thoſe errors corrected and thoſe ſilly prejudices removed, which here keep them at a diſtance from one another? How will the faithful clergyman rejoice with thoſe of his flock who have profited by his labours, and whom he has been the means of reclaiming from vice, or improving in goodneſs? What congratulations and mutual welcomings, may we ſuppoſe, will then take place between all virtuous friends? How agreeable will it be to review together the converſations which they have with one another in this ſtate of darkneſs, and to recollect and compare the ſcenes they now paſs through, the doubts that now perplex them, the different parts they now act, and the different temptations and trials with which they ſtruggle? Are ſuch views and reflections all viſionary? Surely they are not. If there is indeed to be that future junction of the worthy among mankind,

mankind, which I have pleaded for, they are ſufficiently warranted, and muſt offer themſelves to every conſiderate mind.

Another circumſtance which will contribute to the joy we ſhall have in meeting one another hereafter, will be our reflection on the common danger we ſhall have eſcaped. We are told in the plaineſt terms by the mouth of divine wiſdom, that all who do wickedly ſhall be doomed to *that everlaſting fire* * *which*

* Matth. xxv. 41. *Then ſhall he ſay to them on the left hand, Depart from me ye curſed into everlaſting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.* It has been obſerved as remarkable, in the paſſage from whence theſe words are taken, that whereas the *kingdom* into which the righteous are to be advanced, is ſaid to have been prepared for them from before the foundation of the world; the *everlaſting fire*, on the contrary, into which the wicked are to be conſigned, is ſaid to have been prepared, not for them, but for the *devil and his angels.*——This ſeems to intimate to us that the devil and his angels were the firſt tranſgreſſors, who have been the means of involving mankind in guilt and diſtreſs.

which was prepared for the devil and his angels; and that broad is the way, and wide the

I cannot forbear adding, with reſpect to the repreſentation which the ſcriptures often make of the future ſtate of puniſhment, as an *unquenchable and everlaſting fire* into which the wicked are to be caſt; that probably the reaſons of it may be,——1*ſt*, The propriety of an inextinguiſhable fire, which conſumes whatever is thrown into it, to repreſent, in a manner ſtriking to the imagination, the future everlaſting rejection and extermination of all that work iniquity. ——2*dly*, Learned men have obſerved, that there is in this repreſentation an alluſion to the continual fires in the valley of Hinnom near Jeruſalem, where, in idolatrous times, innumerable children had been burnt alive to Moloch; and where, in the times of our Saviour, there was a fire always burning to conſume the filth of the city and the carcaſes of animals. This valley was conſidered by the Jews, for this reaſon, as a place ſo unclean and horrible, that it was natural to make uſe of it as an emblem of the ſtate of future puniſhment. It is well known, that the original words rendered by the tranſlators of the New Teſtament, *Hell-fire*, are the fire of *Gehenna*, or the fire of the valley of *Hinnom*. It was, therefore, from this valley, that the regions of puniſhment came to be called by the antient Jews *Gehenna*, the ſign or emblem being made to ſtand for that which it was ſuppoſed to reſemble.

the gate that leadeth to deſtruction, and that many there be who go in thereat. Every perſon, therefore, who ſhall hereafter attain to happineſs, will be one eſcaped from great danger. And can it be imagined, that the remembrance of this will have no tendency to enhance the ſatisfaction attending the future junction of good men? Will it not be agreeable to ſee that, amidſt the diſmal wreck, our friends have been preſerved; and that they are ſafe landed, after being toſſed on the ſea of this world, and running numberleſs riſks of being caſt away? Will it not give us the higheſt pleaſure to meet among the bleſſed, thoſe perſons for whom, perhaps, we have often ſighed and trembled; or to find, that inſtead of being numbred among the loſt and miſerable, our earneſt wiſhes for them have been anſwered, that they have acquitted themſelves well in life, and *choſen that good part which will never be taken from them?*

Thirdly, It may be proper, on this occaſion, to think of the place where we ſhall hereafter join our virtuous friends. We ſhall meet them in the realms of light; *in that city* * *which hath foundations, whoſe builder and maker is God; in the everlaſting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jeſus Chriſt.* We ſhall ſee them again in thoſe *new heavens and that new* ‡ *earth wherein dwelleth righteouſneſs, into which nothing that defileth, or that loveth or maketh a lie, ſhall be admitted* †; *where all tears will be wiped away from our eyes, and pain and death and ſorrow ſhall be known no more* ‖; where nature will ſhew us its moſt glorious face, and order, peace and love reign in full perfection for ever.

But one of the particulars that moſt requires our notice here is, that our friends will then have loſt their preſent weakneſſes. They will not then be ſuch frail and

* Heb. xi. 10.
† Rev. xxi. 27.
‡ 2 Pet. iii. 13.
‖ Rev. xxi. 4.

and helpleſs beings as we now ſee them. They will not be liable to be inſnared by temptations, or ruffled by unreaſonable paſſions. They will not be haſty in their judgments, capricious in their tempers, or narrow in their opinions. Every wrong byas will be taken from their wills, and the imperfections, which now render them leſs amiable, will be removed. Our hearts ſhall never more ache for their troubles, or feel anguiſh on their account. They will be paſt all ſtorms, cured of all follies, and eaſed of all pains. They will appear in finiſhed dignity and honour, after the education and diſcipline of this world, and be endowed with every excellence which we can wiſh them to have.—What pleaſure will it give to meet them in theſe circumſtances? How delightful will be our intercourſe with them when they, together with ourſelves, ſhall be thus changed and improved?

Once more. In the future world, there will be no ſuch painful ſeparations from

our friends as we now ſuffer.——It can ſcarcely be ſaid that we have in this life, more than juſt time enough to begin friendſhips, and to feel the pangs of ſorrow that attend the diſſolution of them. But, in the heavenly ſtate, we ſhall feel no ſorrows of this kind. Our friends will be *immortal.* Our happineſs in them will be liable to no abatements from the ſad apprehenſion of being ſoon parted from them, and ſeeing them ſink under decay and ſickneſs. We ſhall never be witneſſes to any ſuch ſhocking ſcenes as their expiring agonies. The cruel hand of death will not be able there to reach them, and to tear them from our embraces*. They will flouriſh in eternal health

* "Who would not (ſays Socrates in his apo-"logy) part with a great deal to purchaſe a meeting "with *Orpheus*, *Heſiod*, *Homer*, &c.? If it be true "that this is to be the conſequence of death, I would "even be glad to die often.——What pleaſure will "it give to live with *Palamedes* and others who ſuf-"fered unjuſtly, and to compare my fate with "theirs?

health and vigour, and be with us *for ever with the Lord.*——Such are the circumſtances that, we may imagine, will contribute to the joy attending the future junction of virtuous men in the heavenly ſtate. I cannot help adding the following reflexions.

Firſt, What I have been ſaying has a tendency to increaſe our ſatisfaction in our friends. The proſpect, in general, of a future ſtate, muſt have a moſt friendly influence on our preſent enjoyments. What, indeed, is human life without ſuch a proſpect? What darkneſs reſts upon it, when we conſider it as no more than a paſſing ſhadow, *which appeareth for a little while and then vaniſheth away*; or, as a ſhort period of tumultuous buſ-

" theirs? What an inconceivable happineſs will it " be to converſe, in another world, with *Siſiphus*, " *Ulyſſes*, &c. eſpecially, as thoſe who inhabit that " world ſhall die no more?——Και ηδη του λοιπου χρονου αθανατοι εισιν; ειπερ γε ταλεγομενα αληθη εστιν. Socr. Apol. apud Plat.

tle and uncertain happineſs diminiſhed by many vexations, with an infinite blank before and behind it? Such a view of life deprives its pleaſures of their reliſh. It is enough to chill all our thoughts, and to break every ſpring of noble action within us.—But if, in reality, this life is only an *introduction* to a better life, or the feeble *infancy* of an exiſtence that ſhall never end, it appears with unſpeakable dignity; it has an infinitely important end and meaning; all its enjoyments receive an additional reliſh, and the face of nature will ſhine with greater beauty and luſtre.——In particular, the conſideration of the circumſtance relating to our future exiſtence on which I have been inſiſting, will communicate new joy to all our preſent *friendſhips*. —The reflexion on our friends as heirs with us of the ſame bleſſed immortality, as perſons whom we ſhall meet in the regions of heavenly bliſs and live with for ever, muſt chear our minds in all our-

inter-

intercourſe with them, and cauſe us to look upon them with the higheſt affection and delight. But, to conſider them as only beings of a day, who are to periſh in death we know not how ſoon; How uncomfortable is this? What a damp muſt it throw over our friendſhips? How difficult muſt it be for perſons, who have any tender feelings, to think, without diſtreſs, of agreeable connexions which they ſee will end in a ſpeedy and final ſeparation; or, of valuable friends, all whoſe valuable qualities are, in a little while, to be wholly extinguiſhed, and whom they are juſt going to loſe for ever? The more agreeable the connexions are, the more diſtreſs muſt ſuch apprehenſions create; and the more valuable our friends, the greater reaſon will there be for pain.——But, ſuppoſe what has been aſſerted in this diſcourſe; ſuppoſe, that our preſent connexions are to be renewed hereafter, that we are again to ſee thoſe valuable perſons who are gone before us from hence, or, that the friend-

friendſhips which now take place between worthy men, are only the beginnings of an union of minds, that will be continued and perfected in the heavens: Suppoſe this, I ſay, and all will be triumph. We ſhall have abundant encouragement to cultivate friendſhip. The view of death will have a tendency to increaſe, rather than damp the pleaſures attending it. The addition of a good friend or relative will be the addition of one, who will ſhare with us in the joys of immortality, who will enter with us into the city of the *living God*, and be our everlaſting companion in glory.

It is natural to remark further on this occaſion, how important it is that we cultivate only virtuous friendſhips. Cicero has obſerved, with the higheſt reaſon, that all friendſhip ought to be founded in virtue. There is certainly nothing elſe that can make it ſafe, laſting and happy. It is its cement, life, joy and crown. There is no other permanent founda-

foundation of love, or bond of union between reaſonable beings.——But there is nothing much better fitted to ſhew the importance of virtue in friendſhip, than the ſubject now under our conſideration. How ſhocking muſt it be to believe, that our deareſt intimate is one whom we cannot expect to ſee hereafter in bliſs, one who wants the love of the Deity, and who is haſtening faſt to everlaſting puniſhment? How can any perſon think of having in his boſom an enemy to the order of the world, and a child of perdition and ruin? With what pain muſt an attentive perſon look upon ſuch a friend, and what concern muſt he feel for him? On this account, were irreligious friends to allow themſelves time enough for reflexion, they would neceſſarily be the cauſes of the greateſt trouble to one another. Did they duly attend to their own circumſtances, the danger they are in, the precarioufneſs of life, and the nearneſs of the time when they ſhall be ſeparated, never again to meet, except in that

that world where joy is never known, and hope never comes; did they, I ſay, properly attend to theſe things, they would ſurely be incapable of bearing one another; their love would be turned into anguiſh, and their friendſhip into horror. Let us then avoid, as much as we well can, becoming intimately connected with any, except the virtuous and worthy. Let us reſolve to cultivate friendſhip only with thoſe whom we may hope to be happy with *for ever*.

In the next place. It is a very obvious obſervation on the preſent ſubject, that it affords the beſt conſolation in a time of grief for the death of friends.—It is, I think, very credible that death is an event, for which, ſuch creatures as we are, might not at firſt be deſigned. It looks like a break in our exiſtence, attended with ſuch circumſtances as may well incline us to believe, that it is a *calamity* in which we have been involved, rather than a *method of tranſition* from one ſtate

of exiſtence to another, originally appointed by our Creator and common under his government. This, the ſcriptures declare plainly to be the real fact: But then, it ſhould be remembered, that the ſame ſcriptures inform us further, that we have a great deliverer, who came into the world, *that we might have* * *life*; and who, *by death has deſtroyed death* and *him who had the power of death*, and *obtained for us everlaſting redemption.*

The dark and dreary grave, therefore, has now nothing in it that ſhould make it appear terrible. To virtuous men, it is no more than a bed of reſt till the morning of a joyful reſurrection. We have, as chriſtians, ſomething better to ſupport us under the anguiſh produced by the death of friends, than the cold alternative of the antient philoſophers, that either they are happy, or returned to the ſtate they were in before they were born. We may exult in the expectation of finding them again, and

* John x. 10.——Heb. ii. 14.—ix. 12.

and renewing our friendſhip with them in a better country. The worſt that death can do, is to cauſe a ſhort interruption in our intercourſe with them; or to remove them from our ſight for a moment: We ſhall ſoon follow them, be raiſed up with them to a new life, and take poſſeſſion with them of an *inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away* *. Such are the hopes which the bleſſed goſpel gives; and well may they elevate our minds above theſe ſcenes of mortality, dry up our tears in every ſeaſon of ſorrow, and inſpire us always *with joy unſpeakable and full of glory* †. The whole effect which the inroads made by death among our friends, ſhould have upon us, is to render us more diligent in religious virtue, and to quicken us to greater zeal in endeavouring to ſecure a meeting with them and with all worthy men hereafter. It ſhould belong only to thoſe, whoſe regards are confined to this world and who have no hope, to be inconſolable on ſuch occaſions.

Once

* 1 Peter i. 3, 4. † 1 Peter i. 8.

Once more: I would obſerve, that the expectation which virtuous friends have of being completely happy together hereafter, furniſhes them with a very important direction for regulating their preſent behaviour to one another. They ſhould maintain in their whole deportment, that purity and dignity which become ſo high an expectation. They ſhould endeavour, by their examples and admonitions, to excite in one another an earneſt ardor to excel in every worthy quality, and watch continually over one another, leſt, through the indulgence of any failures, they ſhould loſe future bliſs, and come to be eternally ſeparated from one another. Their views ought to be directed always to the heavenly ſtate, and their whole concern ſhould be ſo to live and converſe together, as to ſecure a joyful meeting there.

The pleaſures of ſociety and friendſhip are ſome of the greateſt we are capable of. It is not credible, that there is any created intelligence that enjoys a happineſs which

is

is independent of all ſocial correſpondencies and connexions. A ſtate wholly ſolitary muſt want many of the principal ſources of bliſs. It appears dark and deſolate, and cannot admit of the exertion of ſome of the nobleſt powers of reaſonable beings. Friendſhip therefore, in all probability, is everlaſting and univerſal in the rational creation, and will make a part of our happineſs in every future period of our exiſtence. The conſideration of this has a tendency to raiſe our ideas of its value, and ſhould engage us to be anxious about ſo acting in this relation now, and ſo improving its bleſſings, as that we may go from hence properly qualified for the more noble and exalted friendſhips of another world.—How noble and exalted theſe will be, it cannot enter into our hearts to conceive. It is impoſſible to look forwards to them with lively faith and attention, without feeling an alacrity and elevation of mind, not to be produced by any other cauſe. Let us, before we diſmiſs this ſubject, fix our thoughts here a moment,

moment, and recollect ſome of the obſervations which have been made.

It gives us, in the preſent life, a pleaſure of the higheſt kind, to converſe with wiſe and worthy men amidſt all our preſent imperfections, and notwithſtanding the certain proſpect of being in a little while parted by death. What then will it be to join the general aſſembly of the great and good in the heavens; to be reſtored there to thoſe who are now the deſire of our eyes and the joy of our hearts; to converſe with them when freed from every weakneſs and adorned with every amiable quality, and to make a part of the glorious company of Chriſt's faithful followers at his ſecond coming? What will it be, not only to have our preſent friendſhips thus perpetuated, but to commence new ones with ſuperior beings; to live and reign with the Saviour of ſinful mortals, and to be for ever improving, with all the virtuous part of the creation, under the eye and care of the Almighty?

We are now frail, feeble, ignorant and helpleſs. We think, we ſpeak and act like children; but, in a little time, we ſhall be advanced to a more perfect ſtate, and receive our complete conſummation in ſoul and body in everlaſting glory. Soon the darkneſs of this world will vaniſh, every weight will be removed from our aſpiring minds, our higheſt faculties gain full ſcope for exertion, and unclouded endleſs day dawn upon us. We ſhall be brought to *the heavenly Jeruſalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the ſpirits of juſt men made perfect, to Jeſus the mediator of the new covenant, and to God the judge of all.* ——We have latent powers which it may be the buſineſs of eternity to evolve. We are capable of an infinite variety of agreeable perceptions and ſenſations, which are now as incomprehenſible to us, as the enjoyments of a grown man are to an infant in the womb. Our preſent exiſtence is but the firſt ſtep of an aſcent in dignity and bliſs, which will never come to an end.—How amazing and extatick this proſpect?

What

What ſhall we ſome time or other be?—But let us take care to remember the truth, which, in this diſcourſe, I have all along kept in ſight. Let us not forget, that none but perſons of righteous lives and characters have reaſon to rejoice in theſe views. —The workers of iniquity will not *riſe* but *ſink*. They will be driven from the ſociety of virtuous beings. They will loſe infinite happineſs, and be caſt away for ever. They are nuiſances in the creation, and unfit to be preſerved; or, according to our Lord's repreſentation, *the tares among the wheat, and when the time of harveſt ſhall come, he will ſay to his reapers, Gather together, firſt the tares, and bind them in bundles, and burn them; but gather the wheat into my barn* *.—Would you then make ſure of the happineſs I have been repreſenting? Would you, when every earthly connexion is broken, obtain admiſſion into a better world, and an union with thoſe you love in the habitations of the juſt? Would you be able, hereafter,

* Matth. xiii. 30.

to join your voice to the voices of millions, who, after the long silence of the grave, will break forth into St. Paul's song of triumph, *O grave, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting? Blessed be God who giveth us the victory thro' Jesus Christ?* Would you rise to *a place on Christ's throne* *; or, see the time when you shall look down upon arch-angels?—Then avoid vice. Practise true religion. Strive to get above defiling passions, and to grow in every excellent disposition?—On this, all depends. This is the only preparation for bliss, and the only way to favour under the divine government. All anxiety, except about this, every human being will soon know to be folly unspeakable.—Remember, that if there is such a state of future existence as has been described, there is nothing worth a single thought, compared with making provision for it; and that, conscious of your own dignity, it becomes you to look continually above every

* Rev. iii. 21.

every thing mortal, and to ſpurn with diſdain at thoſe pleaſures, profits and honours, on which the *children of this world* ſet their hearts.—*Bleſſed are they who keep the commandments of God, that they may have a right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city* *.——*He that overcometh ſhall inherit all things. But the fearful and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murtherers, and whoremongers, and ſorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, ſhall have their part in the lake that burneth with fire and brimſtone; which is the ſecond death.*

* Rev. xxii. 14. xxi. 7, 8.

DISSERTATION IV.

ON

The Importance of Chriſtianity,

The Nature of Hiſtorical Evidence,

AND

MIRACLES.

DISSERTATION IV.

ON

The Importance of Chriſtianity, the Nature of Hiſtorical Evidence, and Miracles.

SECTION I.

Introductory Obſervations, relating to the Importance of Chriſtianity, its Evidences, and the Objections which have been made to it.

IT is not poſſible, that any information ſhould be ſo important, as that which we have in the ſacred writings. The diſcoveries lately made in the ſyſtem of the material world are juſtly thought of with admiration. They beſtow, indeed,

deed, new luſtre and dignity on human nature. But they are of no conſequence and deſerve no regard, compared with the diſcoveries contained in the Bible, ſuppoſing it intitled to our faith. We are here made acquainted with ſeveral facts in the ſcheme of the moral world, and the hiſtory of Providence, which are not only *wonderful*, but *intereſting* in the higheſt degree.

There is nothing in all nature, about which we have ſo much reaſon to wiſh for information, as *death*, the relentleſs deſtroyer which reduces to the duſt every human being, and which, in all ages, has held the world in bondage, and given birth to numberleſs woes and ſorrows. Concerning this, the ſcriptures reveal to us many particulars of the utmoſt importance, which we could not otherwiſe have known. They acquaint us, that it was not an *original part* of the divine ſcheme, but a *calamity* in which our race has been involved, in conſequence of certain

tain connections which took place under the divine government. They inform us of the cauſes which introduced it, and of a ſtupendous diſpenſation of providence which it has occaſioned. They diſcover to us that great *Meſſiah*, by whom God made this world, and who came down from heaven to deliver it from diſtreſs; who is now the Lord of men and angels, and who, hereafter, will appear in glory to aboliſh death, to judge mankind in righteouſneſs, to execute juſtice on the wicked, and to eſtabliſh an *everlaſting kingdom*, in which all the virtuous and worthy ſhall meet, and be completely and unchangeably happy.

I make theſe obſervations in order to ſhew how much it concerns us to ſtudy the ſacred records, and to inquire into the evidences of their divine original. It is not eaſy to conceive of a higher obligation, that ſuch creatures as we are can be under. There is ſcarcely a principle in our natures which does not induce us

to

to this powerfully. In particular; as the ſcriptures inform us of the chief revolutions through which this world *has* paſt, and *will* paſs, the principle of *curioſity* leads us to it. As they profeſs to teach us God's will, and to give an account of a revelation from heaven, all the principles of *piety* lead us to it. But, more eſpecially, we are led to it by the whole force of the principle of *ſelf-love:* For, if the Bible is true, it ſettles the terms of ſalvation, and contains the *words of eternal life*; and, conſequently, the folly of careleſly rejecting it will be infinitely worſe, than the folly would be of careleſly throwing aſide a deed, which, if valid, proved our title to a large eſtate.

I think, with great pleaſure, that the ſubject to which I refer has lately engaged much attention, and undergone a ſtrict ſcrutiny. It is to be wiſhed, that the attention to it may continue, and that all the learned and inquiſitive would unite their efforts towards giving it the

moſt thorough diſcuſſion, allowing every objection its full weight and a fair hearing, and never concealing any thing that may have a tendency to throw light on a controverſy of ſuch moment.—The oppoſition hitherto made to chriſtianity, has, I think, done it the greateſt ſervice. It has been the means of cauſing it to be better underſtood, of ſhewing, in a clearer light, on what foundation of evidence it ſtands, and of removing from it many incumbrances and adulterations, which, for many ages, had miſerably diſguiſed and debaſed it. We may reaſonably hope for more and more of theſe good effects, the more unbelievers go on to exert their ſtrength *. Let no one then put himſelf to the leaſt pain on account of any of their writings. Much leſs, let any one think of calling in the aid of civil power to anſwer them †.

Deteſted

* This is well repreſented in the ſecond of Dr. Gerard's Diſſertations on *Subjects relating to the Genius and Evidences of Chriſtianity.*

† We have lately ſeen a cruel inſtance of this in the proſecution, pillorying and confinement to *Bridewell*

Deteſted be the principles which have occaſioned this. Let rather unbelievers be encouraged to produce their ſtrongeſt objections. If chriſtianity is of God, we may be ſure that it will bear any trial, and in the end prevail.——The civil magiſtrate ought not to interpoſe in the defence of truth, till it has appeared that he is a competent judge of truth. This, certainly, he is not. On the contrary; univerſal experience has, hitherto, proved him one of its worſt

Bridewell of a poor puny infidel, worn out with age, who was utterly incapable of doing any cauſe the leaſt good or harm.—It is a bad excuſe to ſay, that it was not *infidelity*, but *indecency and ſcurrility* that were puniſhed in this inſtance. For, this is to puniſh for the circumſtances in a publication, which render it ſo much the leſs likely to produce any effect. Beſides, who ſhall have the power of determining whether a book againſt an eſtabliſhed opinion is writ *decently*, in order to give a right of puniſhing? There are no hands in which ſuch a power can be lodged, without the utmoſt danger to what, as reaſonable beings, we ought moſt to value. A zealot in a *popiſh* country, cannot well wiſh for any greater power. God grant it may never be again allowed to any zealots in our own.

worſt enemies. Nothing can be more diſgraceful to the chriſtian religion than to ſuppoſe, that it needs *ſuch* aſſiſtance. Were this true, it would, by no means, be worth defending.

Among the objections which have been made to chriſtianity, there are ſome that contain real difficulties; and which a candid defender of chriſtianity, inſtead of pretending intirely to remove, ſhould allow to weigh as far as they can go againſt the evidence. The proof of chriſtianity does not conſiſt of a clear ſum of arguments, without any thing to be oppoſed to them. But it is the *overbalance* of evidence that remains after every reaſonable deduction is made on account of difficulties. This is the caſe with reſpect to almoſt every point that can employ our thoughts; and thoſe who believe, that there is any queſtion which they can clear of every difficulty, may be ſure, that they are either very unfair or very ſuperficial in their inquiries.—But, at the ſame time that I acknowledge this, I muſt ſay, with reſpect

reſpect to chriſtianity, that many of the chief objections to it have received a full anſwer, and are indeed the effects of partial views and very wrong notions.——I will beg leave juſt to mention a few inſtances of this.

It has been ſaid, that if chriſtianity came from God, it would have been taught the world with ſuch clearneſs and preciſion, as not to leave room for doubts and diſputes.—It is wonderful to me, that any perſon can mention this who believes the doctrines of natural religion, or who has read the defences of chriſtianity. Has the author of nature given us *reaſon* in this manner, or even the information we derive from our ſenſes? Is it poſſible, while we continue ſuch creatures as we are, that any inſtruction ſhould be ſo clear as to preclude diſputes? Suppoſing the Deity to grant us ſupernatural light, are we judges what degree of it he ought to give, or in what particular manner it ought to be communicated?

Again:

Again: The animoſities, perſecutions and bloodſhed which the chriſtian religion has occaſioned, have been urged as objections to it.—This, likewiſe, certainly ſhould not be mentioned, till it can be ſhewn, that there is one benefit or bleſſing enjoyed by mankind, which has not been the occaſion of evils. How eaſy would it be to reckon up many dreadful calamities, which owe their exiſtence to knowledge, to liberty, to natural religion, and to civil government? How obvious is it, that what is in its nature moſt uſeful and excellent, will, for this very reaſon, become moſt hurtful and pernicious when miſapplied or abuſed? Chriſtianity forbids every evil work. Its ſpirit is the ſpirit of forbearance, meekneſs, and benevolence. Were it to prevail in its genuine purity, and to be univerſally practiſed, peace and joy would reign every where. Uncharitableneſs, prieſt-craft, contention and perſecution, are evils which have taken place among its profeſſors, in direct oppoſition to its ſcope and deſign. Is it not

then hard that it ſhould be made reſponſible for theſe? Has it not a right to be judged of by its genius and tendencies, rather than by any miſchief which blindneſs and bigotry and the love of domination have done in the chriſtian church?—For my own part, when I contemplate the horrid ſcenes which eccleſiaſtical hiſtory preſents our view, inſtead of feeling diſguſt with chriſtianity, I am ſtruck with the divine foreſight diſcovered by its founder, when he ſaid, *I am not come to ſend peace on earth, but a ſword*; and led to a firmer faith, ariſing from a reflexion on the warning given in the ſcriptures, that an apoſtacy would come, and a ſavage power appear which ſhould defile God's ſanctuary, trample on truth and liberty, and make itſelf drunk with the blood of ſaints and martyrs.

Further: The offence which has been given to unbelievers, by the poſitive inſtitutions of chriſtianity, is in my opinion manifeſtly groundleſs. There is not a more

more ſtriking recommendation of chriſtianity than its *ſimplicity*, or, its freeing religion, ſo much as it does, from the incumbrance of rites and ceremonies. Other religions are loaded with theſe, and have a tendency to hurt the intereſt of morality, by turning the attention of men from it, and leading them to ſeek the favour of God more by an exactneſs in outward forms, than by a virtuous temper and practice. Chriſtianity condemns, in the ſtrongeſt language, this dangerous ſuperſtition, aſſuring us, that thoſe who fall into it ſhall *receive the greater damnation*; that *God deſires mercy and not ſacrifice*; and, that true religion conſiſts, not in any ritual ſervices, but in *righteouſneſs and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghoſt*. To cenſure it, therefore, notwithſtanding this, merely becauſe it enjoins two ſuch eaſy and ſimple rites as *Baptiſm* and the *Lord's Supper*, is doing it great injuſtice, and overlooking one of its moſt peculiar and diſtinguiſhing excellencies.

But, there is no objection about which more has been ſaid, than that taken from the want of univerſality in the chriſtian revelation.—This alſo is an objection which there is great reaſon to expect, that unbelievers ſhould drop. Such effectual anſwers have been given to it, that, indeed, it is ſome trial of patience to ſenſible chriſtians, to hear it ſtill ſo much inſiſted on, and ſo often repeated. Thoſe who are influenced by it go upon a notion that they could not entertain, were they not too partial and careleſs in their inquiries. They ſuppoſe, that if the chriſtian revelation is true, there muſt have been a *neceſſity* of it, in order to ſupply mankind with *ſufficient means* for ſecuring God's favour, and attaining to future happineſs. But ſuch a notion is intirely groundleſs. Acting up faithfully to the light we enjoy, is the only condition of our happineſs. *Glory, honour, and peace, ſhall be upon every one that worketh good, be he Jew or Gentile* *. *God is no reſpecter of perſons,* (*St. Peter*

* Rom. ii. 10.——Acts x. 34, 35.

(*St. Peter* tells us) *but in every nation, he that feareth him, and worketh righteouſneſs, is accepted of him.*—There are two points of view in which chriſtianity may be conſidered. It may be conſidered either as an *inſtruction* communicated to mankind; or, as an extraordinary diſpenſation of providence, the end of which is the *redemption* of mankind. If we conſider it in the former of theſe lights, it was a favour or bleſſing which, however deſirable, could not be claimed, and might not have been given to any part of mankind. Were there reaſon for concluding, that it cannot be of divine original merely becauſe the benefits of it are not extended equally to all, we ſhould be obliged to conclude the ſame of almoſt every advantage we enjoy, and the whole courſe of nature.—If, on the other hand, we conſider chriſtianity in the latter of theſe lights, its end might have been anſwered, by Chriſt's paſſing through human life in the manner he did, though no hiſtory of him had been written, or

knowledge of him preſerved in the world, ——In other words. There were two purpoſes of Chriſt's coming. He came to *teach* and to *reform* the world; but, this being an end that might have been accompliſhed by much lower means, we ought to remember, that he came principally to *ſave* the world. That is; He deſcended from heaven and appeared in our natures, partly, indeed, to be the founder of a viſible church enjoying particular light and advantages, and which, after going through ſeveral revolutions, ſhould, at laſt, triumph over every falſe religion and take in all nations; but, primarily, to be the *deliverer* of a diſtreſt race, to acquire the power of forgiving ſin and of raiſing us from the dead, to reinſtate virtuous men, wherever or whenever they have lived, in the proſpect of a glorious immortality; and thus to perform a ſervice under the divine government of infinite importance, and to which, probably, no agent of inferior dignity was equal.—Chriſtianity, therefore, is ſo far

from implying an obligation on the Deity to make the knowledge of it univerſal, that, on the contrary, in the benefit of what is moſt eſſential to it, all virtuous men, whether they have ever heard of it or not, will be alike ſharers.

Another very conſiderable cauſe of offence to the oppoſers of chriſtianity is, the account given in the goſpel hiſtory of the *Demoniacs*.—It ſhould, I think, go a great way here towards ſatisfying a fair inquirer, that the writers of the goſpel hiſtory ſpeak of the caſes of the *Demoniacs* in no other way than was uſual at the time they wrote, and in which we find them ſpoken of by other contemporary hiſtorians. They talk the language of their age and country, and in conformity to prevailing opinions. Nor is it of any conſequence to the credit of their hiſtory, whether theſe opinions were right or wrong, or even what they themſelves thought. To expect, that they ſhould be better informed than others about the cauſes of diſtempers; or, that ſuch inſtruction ſhould be communicated to them as would have led them, in the preſent caſe, to form a new language and to ſpeak with perfect accuracy,

ſeems as unreaſonable as it would be to entertain the ſame expectation with reſpect to the motion of the ſun, or the ſecondary qualities of bodies. The one has as little to do with the main end of their office as the other. Such inſtruction, had it been given them, would have thrown needleſs difficulties in the way of the propagation of chriſtianity; and it muſt have leſſened its evidence to ſubſequent ages, by making the apoſtles appear, not in the character of plain unlettered men, but of able philoſophers, and thus raiſing a ſuſpicion, that it prevailed in the world more by the wiſdom of men, than by the power of God and *the demonſtration of the Spirit.* Our Saviour, no doubt, might have taught the truth on this ſubject, and rectified the common apprehenſions as far as they were erroneous. But it is impoſſible to ſhew, that there was ſufficient reaſon for expecting this, or that it came properly within the purpoſe of his miſſion. It would, perhaps, have only given him the appearance of being a friend to the *doctrine of the Sadducees*, and embarraſſed the minds of his followers, without doing any great good *.

* There is, perhaps, no part of the New Teſtament from which

The prejudices I have now in view, are derived, chiefly, from the ſtrict notions which have prevailed of the univerſal and infallible inſpiration of the writers of the New Teſtament. And there is not, perhaps, any thing which the friends of chriſtianity have more reaſon to complain of, than that unbelievers ſhould ſuffer themſelves to be influenced by theſe notions.—The goſpel is not a ſpeculative ſcience, or an abſtruſe and complicated theory. Whatever jargon may have been fathered upon it in ſyſtems and creeds, it is in itſelf plain and ſimple. It is a ſet of facts exhibiting and demonſtrating this one truth; ETERNAL LIFE, THE GIFT

 OF

which unbelievers receive more unfavourable impreſſions than the account of our Saviour's temptation in the wilderneſs by the devil. This fact has, I think, been very much miſinterpreted. The explanation given of it in a piece entitled, *An Enquiry into the Nature and Deſign of Chriſt's Temptation in the Wilderneſs*, by Mr. *Farmer*; is, in my opinion, ſo rational and judicious, as to have no ſmall tendency to remove the prejudices againſt it, and to convert this difficulty into a beauty.

I cannot help adding, that the ſame learned writer's Diſſertation on *Miracles* lately publiſhed, well deſerves to be ſtudied by all who would be aſſiſted in judging of ſome other parts of the Scripture Hiſtory, as well as of the nature of Miracles in general, and the connection between them and the truth of the doctrines of Chriſtianity.

OF GOD, THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD. The New Teſtament contains a narrative of theſe facts. The buſineſs of the apoſtles was to atteſt and publiſh them to the world; and no enquiries, relating to their qualifications and authority, are of great importance in any other view, than as *witneſſes* to theſe facts. I think, indeed, that they have an authority as *teachers*, as well as *witneſſes*: But what they inſiſt themſelves moſt upon, is their office as witneſſes, and the regard they claim is founded principally on their having heard, and ſeen *, and handled the *word of life*. It does not appear, that in all matters of reaſoning and ſpeculation, the firſt chriſtians entertained the ſame ſentiments of their authority, that many do now. Be this, however, as it will; the only queſtion, certainly, that affects the truth of chriſtianity is, "Whether they were honeſt men, "who did not mean to deceive, and "who were competently informed with "reſpect to the facts they atteſt."——— I wiſh the attention of unbelievers could

* 1 John i. 1, 2.

be held to this, ſetting aſide whatever is commonly believed, or, that there may be reaſon to believe, on the ſubject of *inſpiration.* If this appears, (as, I think, it does abundantly) chriſtianity is proved; nor need any perſon be anxious about more in it than neceſſarily follows from hence.——But, it is time to come to the main deſign of this diſſertation.

One of the objections that deſerves moſt to be attended to, is that taken from the nature of the principal facts recorded in the ſcriptures. Theſe are *miraculous*, and, as ſuch, (it has been ſaid) "have a *parti-*
"*cular incredibility* in them, which does
"not belong to *common* events. When we
"look into the Bible, we find ourſelves
"tranſported, as it were, into a new world,
"where the courſe of nature is altered, and
"every thing is different from what we
"have been uſed to obſerve. Could we,
"in any other caſe, receive a book filled
"with viſions and prodigies, and contain-
"ing ſo much of the *marvellous*? Ought
"not

" not ſuch a book to ſtartle our minds?
" Or can there be any evidence ſufficient
" to eſtabliſh its authority?"—Some have gone ſo far in this way of objecting, as to aſſert in general, that all relations of facts which contradict experience, or imply a deviation from the uſual courſe of nature, are their own confutation, and ſhould be at once rejected as incapable of proof, and impoſſible to be true.——One cannot be better employed than in inquiring how far ſuch ſentiments are right, and what regard is really due to *teſtimony*, when its reports do not agree with *experience*. I ſhall endeavour to ſtate this matter as accurately as poſſible, by entering into a critical examination of the grounds of belief in this caſe, and of the nature and force of hiſtorical evidence.

In anſwer to the queſtions juſt propoſed it might be ſaid, that, ſuppoſing the ſtate and connections of this world to be ſuch as the Bible repreſents, the hiſtory it contains could not but be a hiſtory of extra-

ordinary

ordinary events; that it has many internal marks of truth and authority which no other book has; and that, particularly, we are witneſſes to the accompliſhment of predictions delivered in it thouſands of years ago, and therefore, do ourſelves ſee facts as wonderful as any of thoſe it relates, and are ſure that the writers of it were ſupernaturally inſtructed, and might alſo, very probably, work miracles.——What has been laſt intimated is of the greateſt importance. Chriſtians inſiſt, and they think they have proved, that there are very remarkable appearances of the completion of ſeveral ſcripture prophecies. The patrons of infidelity ought to ſhew, if they can, that there are not indeed any ſuch appearances which deſerve regard. Nothing can be more incumbent upon them than this: For, as far as there ſeems reaſon to believe, that, in any inſtance, a ſcripture prophecy is fulfilled, an unprejudiced perſon muſt be impreſſed. It affords, not only a demonſtration of the credibility of miracles, but, in ſome degree, an *actual exhibition* of them.

But,

But, it is not my preſent deſign to dwell on any arguments of this kind. In what follows, I ſhall confine myſelf to the examination of the *principles* on which the objection I have mentioned is founded. When theſe are proved to be fallacious, the way will be open to an eaſier admiſſion of the *direct evidences* of chriſtianity, and they will operate with greater force.—— It is well known, that this objection has lately been urged in all its ſtrength by Mr. *Hume*, a writer whoſe genius and abilities are ſo diſtinguiſhed, as to be above any of *my* commendations. Several excellent anſwers have been publiſhed *; and

* By Dr. *Adams* in his *Eſſay on Miracles, in anſwer to Mr. Hume's Eſſay*; and by the author of the *Criterion*, or, *Miracles Examined*, &c.—And alſo by Dr. Campbell, *principal of the Mariſchal college at Aberdeen*, in a Treatiſe, entitled, *A Diſſertation on Miracles, containing an Examination of the Principles advanced by David Hume, Eſq; in an Eſſay on Miracles.*——The laſt of theſe anſwers was publiſhed ſeveral years after the others. I mention this becauſe, from Dr. Campbell's never referring to any other anſwers, as well as from his manner of expreſſing

and it is not without ſome pain, after what has been ſo well and ſo effectually ſaid by others, that I determine to take up this ſubject. I imagine, however, that it admits of further diſcuſſion, and that there remain ſtill ſome obſervations to be made, which have not been enough attended to.—Before I proceed, it will be proper to give a more diſtinct and full account of the objection to be conſidered.

expreſſing himſelf ſometimes, an inattentive reader might be led to conclude that at the time he wrote the ſubject was quite open to him. His book, however, has uncommon merit, and the public is much indebted to him for it.

SECT. II.

The Nature and Grounds of the Regard due to Experience and to the Evidence of Teſtimony, ſtated and compared.

"EXPERIENCE, we have been told, "is the ground of the credit we give "to *human teſtimony.* We have found, "in paſt inſtances, that men have informed "us right, and therefore are diſpoſed to "believe them in future inſtances. But "this experience is by no means conſtant; "for we often find that men prevaricate "and deceive.——On the other hand: "What aſſures us of thoſe laws of nature, "in the violation of which the notion of "a miracle conſiſts, is, in like manner, "experience. But, this is an experience "that has never been interrupted. We have "never been deceived in our expectations, "that the dead will not come to life, or

"that

" that the command of a man will not
" immediately cure a diſeaſe. There ariſes,
" therefore, from hence, a proof againſt
" accounts of miracles which is the
" ſtrongeſt of the kind poſſible, and to
" believe ſuch accounts on the authority
" of human teſtimony, is to prefer a
" weaker proof to a ſtronger; to leave a
" guide that *never* has deceived us, in order
" to follow one that has *often* deceived us;
" or to receive, upon the credit of an
" experience that is *weak* and *variable*,
" what is contrary to *invariable* expe-
" rience."

In other words: " A miracle is an
" event, from the nature of it, inconſiſtent
" with all the experience we ever had, and
" in the higheſt degree incredible and ex-
" traordinary. In the falſhood of teſti-
" mony, on the contrary, there is no ſuch
" inconſiſtency, nor any ſuch incredibility,
" ſcarcely any thing being more common.
" No regard, therefore, can be due to the
" latter, when it is applied as a proof of
" the former.—According to this reaſon-

" ing, we are always to compare the im-
" probability of a fact, with the improba-
" bility of the falſhood of the teſtimony
" which aſſerts it, and to determine our
" aſſent to that ſide on which the leaſt
" improbability lies. Or, in the caſe of
" miracles, we are to conſider which is
" moſt likely, that ſuch events ſhould
" happen, or that men ſhould either de-
" ceive or be deceived. And, as there
" is nothing more unlikely than the for-
" mer, or much more common than the
" latter, particularly where religion is
" concerned; it will be right to form a
" *general reſolution, never to lend any at-*
" *tention to accounts of miracles, with what-*
" *ever ſpecious pretexts they may be covered**.

" *It is*, ſays Mr. Hume, *a maxim worthy*
" *of our attention, that no teſtimony is*
" *ſufficient to eſtabliſh a miracle, unleſs the*
" *teſtimony be of ſuch a kind, that its*
" *falſe-*

* See the *Eſſay on Miracles*, in *Mr. Hume's Philoſophical Eſſays concerning human Underſtanding*, p. 205, 2d edition, in the Note.

" *falſehood would be more miraculous than*
" *the fact which it endeavours to eſtabliſh.*
" *And even in that caſe, there is a mutual*
" *deſtruction of arguments, and the ſuperior*
" *only gives us an aſſurance ſuitable to that*
" *degree of force, which remains after de-*
" *ducting the inferior. When any one tells*
" *me that he ſaw a dead man reſtored to life,*
" *I immediately conſider with myſelf, whe-*
" *ther it be more probable that the perſon*
" *ſhould either deceive or be deceived, or*
" *that the fact he relates ſhould really have*
" *happened. I weigh the one miracle*
" *againſt the other, and according to the*
" *ſuperiority which I diſcover, I pronounce*
" *my deciſion, and always reject the greater*
" *miracle. If the falſehood of his teſtimony*
" *would be more miraculous than the event*
" *which he relates, then, and not till then,*
" *can he pretend to command my belief or*
" *opinion* *." —For ſuch reaſons as theſe,

Mr.

* Ib. P. 182. —— P. 206. *I deſire any one to lay his hand on his heart, and after ſerious conſideration declare, whether he thinks that the falſehood of ſuch a*

Mr. Hume aſſerts, " *That the evidence* " *of teſtimony, when applied to a miracle,* " *carries falſehood upon the very face of it,* " *and is more properly a ſubject of deriſion* " *than of argument* †; and that whoever " believes the truth of the chriſtian reli- " gion, *is conſcious of a continued mira-* " *cle in his own perſon, which ſubverts all* " *the principles of his underſtanding, and* " *gives him a determination to believe what* " *is moſt contrary to cuſtom and experience* ‡."

This is the objection in its complete force. It has, we ſee, a plauſible appearance, and is urged with much confidence. But I cannot heſitate in aſſerting that it is founded on falſe principles; and, I think, this muſt appear to be true, to any one who will beſtow attention on the following obſervations.

The

book, (the Pentateuch) *ſupported by ſuch teſtimony, would be more extraordinary and miraculous than all the miracles it relates; which is however neceſſary, to make it be received, according to the meaſures of probability above eſtabliſhed.*

† Page 195. ‡ Page 207.

The principles on which this objection is built are chiefly, "That the credit we "give to teſtimony, is derived *ſolely* from "experience;" "That a miracle is a fact "*contrary* to experience;" "That the "previous improbability of a fact is a proof "againſt it, diminiſhing, in proportion to the "degree of it, the proof from teſtimony for "it;" and "That no teſtimony ſhould "ever gain credit to an event, unleſs it is "more extraordinary that it ſhould be falſe, "than that the event ſhould have happen-"ed." I will, as briefly as poſſible, examine each of theſe aſſertions in the order in which they have been now mentioned.

With this view it is neceſſary firſt to conſider the nature and the foundation of that aſſurance which experience gives us of the laws of nature. This aſſurance is nothing but the conviction we have, that future events will be agreeable to what we have hitherto found to be the courſe of nature, or the *expectation* ariſing in us, upon having obſerved that an event has

happened in former experiments, that it will happen again in *future* experiments. This expectation has been repreſented as one of the greateſt myſteries, and the reſult of an ingenious and elaborate diſquiſition about it is, that it cannot be founded on any reaſon, and conſiſts only in an aſſociation of ideas derived from habit, or a diſpoſition in our imaginations to paſs from the idea of one object to the idea of another which we have found to be its uſual attendant*. But ſurely, never before were ſuch difficulties raiſed on a point ſo plain.—If I was to draw a ſlip of paper out of a wheel, where I knew there were more white than black papers, I ſhould intuitively ſee, that there was a probability of drawing a white paper, and therefore ſhould *expect* this; and he who ſhould make a myſtery of ſuch an expectation, or apprehend any difficulty in accounting for it, would not deſerve to be ſeriouſly argued with.—In like manner; if, out of a wheel, the

* See Mr. Hume's Philoſophical Eſſays, Eſſay 4th and 5th.

the particular contents of which I am ignorant of, I ſhould draw a white paper a hundred times together, I ſhould ſee that it was probable, that it had in it more white papers than black, and therefore ſhould expect to draw a white paper the next trial. There is no more difficulty in this caſe than in the former; and it is equally abſurd in both caſes to aſcribe the *expectation*, not to *knowledge*, but to *inſtinct*. —The caſe of our aſſurance of the laws of nature, as far as we are ignorant of the cauſes that operate in nature, is exactly the ſame with this. An experiment which has often ſucceeded, we expect to ſucceed again, becauſe we perceive intuitively, that ſuch a conſtancy of event muſt proceed from ſomething in the conſtitution of natural cauſes, diſpoſing them to produce it; nor will it be poſſible to deny this, till it can be proved, that it is not a firſt principle of reaſon, that of every thing that comes to paſs there muſt be ſome account or cauſe; or, that a conſtant re-currency of the ſame event is not

a fact which requires any cauſe.—In a word: We truſt experience, and expect that the future ſhould reſemble the paſt in the courſe of nature, for the very ſame reaſon that, ſuppoſing ourſelves otherwiſe in the dark, we ſhould conclude that a dye which has turned an ace oftener in *paſt* trials is moſtly marked with aces, and conſequently ſhould expect, that it will go on to turn the ſame number oftener in *future* trials.—The ground of the expectation produced by experience being this, it is obvious that it will always be weaker or ſtronger, in proportion to the greater or leſs conſtancy and uniformity of our experience. Thus from the happening of an event in every trial a million of times, we ſhould conclude more confidently, that it will happen again the next trial, than if it had happened leſs frequently, or if in ſome of theſe inſtances it had failed. The plain reaſon is, that in the former caſe it would appear that the cauſes producing the event are probably of a more fixed nature, and leſs liable to be counteracted

acted by oppoſite cauſes.—It muſt, however, be remembered, that the greateſt uniformity and frequency of experience will not afford a proper *proof*, that an event will happen in a future trial, or even render it ſo much as probable, that it will *always* happen in all future trials. ——In order to explain this, let us ſuppoſe a ſolid which, for ought we know, may be conſtituted in any one of an infinity of different ways, and that we can judge of it only from experiments made in throwing it. The oftener we ſuppoſe ourſelves to have ſeen it turn the ſame face, the more we ſhould reckon upon its turning the ſame face, when thrown next. But though we knew, that it had turned the ſame face in every trial a million of times, there would be no *certainty*, that it would turn this face again in any particular future trial, nor even the leaſt *probability*, that it would *never* turn any other face. What would appear would be only, that it was *likely*, that it had about a million and a half

more

more of theſe ſides than of all others *; or, that its nature was ſuch as diſpoſed it to turn this ſide oftener, in this proportion,

* If any one wants a further explication of what is here ſaid, let him conſider, that as there is only a *high probability*, not a *certainty*, that the ſuppoſed ſolid, after turning the ſame ſide a million of times without once failing, would turn again this ſide in the next trial, the probability muſt be leſs, that it would turn this ſide in *two* future trials, and ſtill leſs, that it would do it in *three* future trials; and thus, the probability will decreaſe continually as the number of the ſuppoſed trials is increaſed, till, at laſt, it will become an equal chance, and from thence paſs into an improbability.—This may be a little differently repreſented thus. Let a ſolid be ſuppoſed that has 1,600,000 ſides of the ſame ſort, to one of any other ſort. There is a probability, that in a million of trials, ſuch a ſolid would turn conſtantly the ſame ſide. Such a ſuppoſition, therefore, would completely account for this event, ſuppoſing it to happen; *and nothing further could, with reaſon, be concluded from it.* But, there is an *infinity* of other ſuppoſitions that will alſo account for it, of which the particular ſuppoſition that it has no ſides of any other ſort, and that, therefore, it will never turn any other, is *only one.* Againſt the truth, therefore, of this particular ſuppoſition, there muſt be, in the circumſtances of ignorance above ſuppoſed, the greateſt probability.

portion, than any other; not that it had no other ſides, or that it would never turn any others. In reality, there would be the greateſt probability againſt this.——— Theſe obſervations are applicable, in the exacteſt manner, to what paſſes in the courſe of nature, as far as *experience* is our guide. Upon obſerving, that any natural event has happened often or invariably, we have only reaſon to expect that it will happen again, with an aſſurance proportioned to the frequency of our obſervations. But, we have no *abſolute proof* that it will happen again in any particular future trial; nor the leaſt reaſon to believe that it will always happen *. For ought we

* In an eſſay publiſhed in vol. 53d of the *Philoſophical Tranſactions*, what is ſaid here and in the laſt note, is proved by mathematical demonſtration, and a method ſhewn of determining the exact probability of all concluſions founded on induction.——This is plainly a curious and important problem, and it has ſo near a relation to the ſubject of this diſſertation, that it will be proper juſt to mention the reſults of the ſolution of it in a few particular caſes.

Suppoſe, 1*ſt*, all we know of an event to be, that it has happened ten times without failing, and that it

we know, there may be occaſions on which it will fail, and ſecret cauſes in the frame of

it is inquired, what reaſon we ſhall have for thinking ourſelves right, if we judge, that the probability of its happening in a ſingle trial, lies ſomewhere between ſixteen to one and two to one.—The anſwer is, that the chance for being right, would be .5013, or very nearly an equal chance.—Take next, the particular caſe mentioned above, and ſuppoſe, that a ſolid or dye, of whoſe number of ſides and conſtitution we know nothing, except from experiments made in throwing it, has turned conſtantly the ſame face in a million of trials.—In theſe circumſtances, it would be *improbable*, that it had *leſs* than 1,400,000 more of theſe ſides or faces than of all others; and it would be alſo *improbable*, that it had *above* 1,600,000 more. The chance for the latter is .4647, and for the former .4895. There would, therefore, be no reaſon for thinking, that it would never turn any other ſide. On the contrary, it would be likely that this would happen in 1,600,000 trials.——In like manner, with reſpect to any event in nature, ſuppoſe the flowing of the tide, if it has flowed at the end of a certain interval a million of times, there would be the probability expreſſed by .5105, that the odds for its flowing again at the uſual period was *greater* than 1,400,000 to 1, and the probability expreſſed by .5352, that the odds was *leſs* than 1,600,000 to one.

Such are the concluſions which *uniform* experience warrants.—What follows is a *ſpecimen* of the expectations,

of things which *ſometimes* may counteract thoſe by which it is produced.

But

pectations, which it is reaſonable to entertain in the caſe of *interrupted* or *variable* experience.——If we know no more of an event than that it has happened ten times in eleven trials, and failed once, and we ſhould conclude from hence, that the probability of its happening in a ſingle trial lies between the odds of nine to one, and eleven to one, there would be twelve to one *againſt* being right.—If it has happened a hundred times, and failed ten times, there would alſo be the odds of near three to one *againſt* being right in ſuch a concluſion.—If it has happened a thouſand times and failed a hundred, there would be an odds *for* being right of a little more than two to one. And, ſuppoſing the ſame *ratio* preſerved of the number of happenings to the number of failures, and the ſame gueſs made, this odds will go on increaſing for ever, as the number of trials is increaſed.—He who would ſee this explained and proved at large may conſult the eſſay in the Philoſophical Tranſactions, to which I have referred; and alſo the ſupplement to it in the 54th volume.—The ſpecimen now given is enough to ſhew how very inaccurately we are apt to ſpeak and judge on this ſubject, previouſly to calculation. See Mr. Hume's Eſſay on Miracles, p. 175, 176, *&c.* and Dr. Campbell's Eſſay, Sect. 2d, p. 35.——It alſo demonſtrates, that the order of events in nature is derived from permanent cauſes eſtabliſhed by an in-

But to ſay no more at preſent of this. Let us, in the next place, conſider what is the ground of the regard we pay to *human teſtimony.*——We may, I think, ſee plainly, that it is not experience only; meaning, all along, that kind of experience to which we owe our expectation of natural events, the cauſes of which are unknown to us. Were this the caſe, the regard we ought to pay to teſtimony, would be in proportion to the number of inſtances, in which we have found, that it has given us right information, compared with thoſe in which it has deceived us; and it might be calculated in the ſame manner with the regard due to any concluſions derived from induction. But this is by no means the truth. One action,

telligent Being in the conſtitution of nature, and not from any of the powers of chance. And it further proves, that ſo far is it from being true, that the underſtanding is not the faculty which teaches us to rely on experience, that it is capable of determining, *in all caſes*, what concluſions ought to be drawn from it, and what *preciſe degree* of confidence ſhould be placed in it.

action, or one converſation with a man, may convince us of his integrity and induce us to believe his teſtimony, though we had never, in a ſingle inſtance, experienced his veracity. His manner of telling his ſtory, its being corroborated by other teſtimony, and various particulars in the nature and circumſtances of it, may ſatisfy us that it muſt be true. We feel in ourſelves that a regard to truth is one principle in human nature; and we know, that there muſt be ſuch a principle in every reaſonable being, and that there is a neceſſary repugnancy between the perception of moral diſtinctions and deliberate falſehood. To this, chiefly, is owing the credit we give to human teſtimony. And from hence in particular, muſt be derived our belief of veracity in the Deity.—It might be ſhewn here in many ways, that there is a great difference between the conviction produced by teſtimony, and the conviction produced by experience. But I will content myſelf with juſt taking notice, that the one is capable of being carried

much higher than the other. When any events, in the courſe of nature, have often happened, we are ſure, properly, of nothing but the paſt fact. Nor, I think, is there in general, antecedently to their happening, any compariſon between the aſſurance we have that they will happen, and that which we have of many facts the knowledge of which we derive from teſtimony. For example; we are not ſo certain that the tide will go on to ebb and flow, and the ſun to riſe and ſet in the manner they have hitherto done, a year longer, as we are that there has been ſuch a man as *Alexander*, or ſuch an empire as the *Roman* *.

From

* It might have been added here, as another obſervation of conſiderable importance, that the greateſt part of what is commonly called experience is merely the report of teſtimony. "Our own expe-"rience (ſays an excellent writer) reaches around, "and goes back but a little way; but the experience "of others, on which we chiefly depend, is derived "to us wholly from teſtimony." Dr. *Adams's Eſſay on Miracles*, page 5th.—In proportion, therefore, as

From theſe obſervations it follows, that to uſe *teſtimony* to prove a *miracle* implies no abſurdity. It is not uſing a *feebler* experience to overthrow another of the ſame kind, which is *ſtronger*: But, uſing an argument to eſtabliſh an event, which yields a direct and poſitive proof, and is capable of producing the ſtrongeſt conviction to overthrow another founded on different principles, and which, at beſt, can prove no more than that, previouſly to the event, there would have appeared to us a preſumption againſt its happening.

What I now mean will be greatly confirmed by obſerving, that a miracle cannot, with ſtrict propriety, be ſtyled an event *contrary* to experience. This is the ſecond of the aſſertions in Mr. *Hume*'s argument, which I have before mentioned, and to

as we weaken the evidence of teſtimony, we weaken alſo that of experience; and in comparing them we ought in reaſon to oppoſe to the former, only what remains of the latter after that part of it which is derived from the former, that is, after much the greateſt part of it is deducted.

which there is, I think, reaſon to object. A miracle is more properly an event *different* from experience than *contrary* to it. Were I to ſee a tempeſt calmed inſtantaneouſly by the word of a man, all my paſt experience would remain the ſame; and were I to affirm that I ſaw what was contrary to it, I could only mean, that I ſaw what I never before had any experience of. In like manner; was I to be aſſured by eye witneſſes that, on a particular occaſion, ſome event, different from the uſual courſe of things, had happened, teſtimony, in this caſe, would afford direct and peremptory evidence for the fact. But what information would experience give?——It would only tell me what happened on other occaſions, and in other inſtances. Its evidence, therefore, would be entirely negative *. It would afford no proper proof that the event did not happen, for it can be no part of any one's experience, that the courſe of nature will continue always the

* See Dr. *Adams's Eſſay*, p. 9—24. 2d Edit. p. 10—31. 3d Edit.

the ſame.——It cannot then be proper to aſſert (as Mr. *Hume*† does) that, in every caſe of a miracle ſupported by teſtimony, there is a conteſt of two oppoſite experiences, the ſtrongeſt of which ought always to determine our judgments.

But this leads me to take notice of the fundamental error in this argument: an error which, I fancy, every perſon muſt be ſenſible of when it is mentioned, and for the ſake of pointing out which chiefly this diſſertation is written.——— The error I mean is contained in the aſſertion, that "if, previouſly to an event, "there was a greater probability *againſt* "its happening, than there is *for* the "truth of the teſtimony endeavouring "to eſtabliſh it, the former deſtroys the "latter, and renders the event unlikely "to have happened in proportion to its "ſuperiority." That this is a fundamental point in Mr. *Hume*'s objection muſt be apparent to thoſe who have

† *Eſſay on Miracles*, Page 179.

conſidered it. By the conteſt between two oppoſite experiences in miraculous facts ſupported by teſtimony, the greateſt of which always deſtroys the other as far as its force goes; he cannot conſiſtently mean any thing but this. One of the oppoſite experiences muſt be that which acquaints us with the courſe of nature, and by which, as before explained, it is rendered probable in proportion to the number of inſtances in which an event has happened, that it will happen in future trials. The other muſt be that from whence the credit we give to teſtimony is derived, which, according to Mr. *Hume*, being our obſervation of the uſual conformity of facts to the reports of witneſſes, makes it probable that any event reported by witneſſes has happened, in proportion to what we have experienced of this conformity. Now, as in the caſe of miraculous facts theſe probabilities oppoſe one another, and the greateſt, according to Mr. Hume, muſt be the firſt, becauſe the experience which produces it

is conſtant and invariable; it follows, that there muſt be always a great overbalance of evidence againſt their reality. He ſeems to lay it down as a general maxim, that if it is more improbable that any fact ſhould have really happened, than that men ſhould either deceive or be deceived, it ſhould be rejected by us.——But, it muſt be needleſs to take any pains to ſhew, that the turning point in Mr. Hume's argument is that which I have mentioned; or, in other words, the principle, that no teſtimony ſhould engage our belief, except the improbability in the falſehood of it is greater than that in the event which it atteſts *.

In order to make it appear that this is an error, what I deſire may be conſidered

* Let it be remembered, that the improbability of event here mentioned, muſt mean the improbability which we ſhould have ſeen there was of its happening independently of any evidence for it, or, previouſly to the evidence of teſtimony informing us that it *has* happened. No other improbability can be meant, becauſe the whole diſpute is about the improbability that remains after the evidence of teſtimony given for the event.

is, the degree of improbability which there is againſt almoſt all the moſt common facts, independently of the evidence of teſtimony for them. In many caſes of particular hiſtories which are immediately believed upon the ſlighteſt teſtimony, there would have appeared to us, previouſly to this teſtimony, an improbability of almoſt infinity to one againſt their reality, as any one muſt perceive, who will think how ſure he is of the falſehood of all facts that have *no* evidence to ſupport them, or which he has only *imagined* to himſelf. It is then very common for the ſlighteſt teſtimony to overcome an almoſt infinite improbability.

To make this more evident: Let us ſuppoſe, that teſtimony informed us rightly ten times to one in which it deceived us; and that there was nothing to direct our judgments concerning the regard due to witneſſes, beſides the degree of conformity which we have experienced in paſt events to their reports. In this caſe, there would

would be the probability of ten to one for the reality of every fact ſupported by teſtimony. Suppoſe then that it informs me of the ſucceſs of a perſon in an affair, againſt the ſucceſs of which there was the probability of a hundred to one, or of any other event previouſly improbable in this proportion. I aſk, What, on this ſuppoſition, would be, on the whole, the probability that the event really happened? Would the right way of computing be, to compare the probability of the truth of the teſtimony with the probability that the event would not happen, and to reject the event with a confidence proportioned to the ſuperiority of the latter above the former? This Mr. *Hume* directs; but certainly contrary to all reaſon.——The truth is, that the teſtimony would give the probability of ten to one to the event, unabated by the ſuppoſed probability againſt it. And one reaſon of this is, that the very experience which teaches us to give credit to teſtimony, is an experience by which we have

found, that it has informed us rightly concerning facts, in which there would have appeared to us, previouſly, a great improbability.

But to be yet more explicit; Let us ſuppoſe the event reported by teſtimony to be, that a particular ſide of a die was thrown twice in two trials, and that the teſtimony is of ſuch a nature that it has as often informed us wrong as right. In this caſe there would plainly be an equal chance for the reality of the event, though, previouſly, there was the probability of thirty-five to one againſt it: And every one would ſee, that it would be abſurd to ſay, that there being ſo conſiderable a probability againſt the event, and no probability at all for the truth of the teſtimony; or, that having had much more frequent experience that two trials have not turned up the ſame face of a die, than of the conformity of facts to the ſuppoſed teſtimony, therefore, no regard is due to the teſtimony.——An

evidence

evidence that is *often* connected with truth, though not *oftner* than with falſehood, is real evidence, and deſerves regard. To reject ſuch evidence would be to fall *often* into error, whatever improbabilities may attend the events to which it is applied; and to aſſert the contrary, would be to aſſert a manifeſt contradiction.

The end of a news-paper confines it, in a great meaſure, to the relation of ſuch facts as are uncommon. Suppoſe that it reports truth only twice in three times, and that there are *nine* ſuch uncommon facts reported by it as, that a certain perſon is alive in his hundredth year, that another was ſtruck dead by lightning, or that a woman has been delivered of three children at a birth; Would it be right to reject *all* theſe facts, becauſe more extraordinary than the report of falſehood by the news-paper? To ſay this, would be to ſay, that what, by ſuppoſition, reports truth *ſix* times in *nine*, does not report truth *once* in nine times.

But

But let us take a higher caſe of this kind. The improbability of drawing a lottery in any particular aſſigned manner, independently of the evidence of teſtimony, or of our own ſenſes, acquainting us that it *has* been drawn in that manner, is ſuch as exceeds all conception *. And yet the moſt common teſtimony is ſufficient

* This improbability is as the number of different ways which there are of drawing the lottery; or, as the number of permutations which a number of things, equal to that of the tickets in the lottery, admits of. In a lottery, therefore, of 50,000 tickets, this improbability is expreſſed by the proportion of 1x2x3x4x5x6, &c. continued to 50,000. to one. Or, it is the ſame with that of drawing ſuch a lottery exactly in the order of the numbers, firſt 1, then 2, and ſo on to the laſt. Moſt perſons will ſcarcely be able to perſuade themſelves, that this is not an abſolute impoſſibility; and yet in truth, it is equally poſſible, and was beforehand equally probable with that very way in which, after drawing the lottery, we believe it has been drawn: And what is ſimilar to this is true of almoſt every thing that can be offered to our aſſent, independently of any evidence for it; and particularly, of numberleſs facts which are the objects of teſtimony, and which are continually believed, without the leaſt heſitation, upon its authority.

cient to put us out of doubt about it. Suppoſe here a perſon was to reject the evidence offered him on the pretence, that the improbability of the falſehood of it is almoſt infinitely leſs than that of the event*; or, ſuppoſe, that univerſally a perſon was to reject all accounts which he reads

* The falſe principle, which is the foundation of this method of reaſoning, has been too eaſily received. Several conſiderable writers, as well as Mr. Hume, ſeem to have been deceived by it. Had not this been, in ſome degree, true of even Dr. Campbell, he would perhaps have expreſſed himſelf differently in ſomeparts of the firſt and ſixth ſections of the firſt part of his very judicious diſſertation before mentioned.—In the caſe he ſuppoſes, of the loſs of a paſſage boat which had croſſed a river two thouſand times ſafely; it is plain, that an evidence of much leſs weight than the probability, that an experiment which had ſucceeded two thouſand times will ſucceed the next time, would be ſufficient to convince us of the reality of the event. Any report that has been oftener found to be true than falſe would engage belief, tho' the conviction we ſhould have had, ſuppoſing no ſuch report, that the event did not happen, would have been much ſtronger than any that the report itſelf is capable of producing. The reaſon of this has been aſſigned above.

reads or hears of facts which are more uncommon, than it is that he ſhould read or hear what is falſe: What would be thought of ſuch a perſon? How ſoon would he be made to ſee and acknowledge his miſtake?

In the caſe I have mentioned of a newspaper ſuppoſed to report truth twice in three times, the odds of *two* to *one*, would overcome the odds of *thouſands* to *one*. This is no more than ſaying, that an evidence which, in caſes where there were great odds againſt an event, has been found true twice in three times, *is* true in ſuch caſes twice in three times, and communicates the probability of 2 to 1 to the event to which it is applied. Every one will ſee that this is an aſſertion ſo plainly true as to be trifling; and yet the principal part of what I am here aſſerting may be reduced to it.—The previous improbability of moſt common facts, that is, the improbability we ſhould ſee to be in them were they unconnected with all evidence for them,

is,

is, I have obſerved, very great. We have, generally, found teſtimony right, when applied to ſuch facts. It is therefore reaſonable to give credit to it when ſo applied, tho' not ſo likely to be true as it was that the facts ſhould not happen: And ſaying this, is only ſaying, that an evidence *generally* right ought to be received as being ſo, notwithſtanding improbabilities by which we have found it not to be affected; I will add, and by which too we know that it is *its nature* not to be affected.

What has been laſt ſaid requires explanation; and it will be proper to dwell a little upon it, in order more fully to ſhew the nature of hiſtorical evidence, and the reaſon and truth of all I have ſaid concerning it.——What I deſire may be here attended to is chiefly the following aſſertion, "that improbabilities *as ſuch* do not "leſſen the capacity of teſtimony to report "truth."—The only cauſes of falſehood in teſtimony are the intention to deceive, and the danger of being deceived. Setting aſide the

the former, let us, for the ſake of greater preciſion, confine our views at preſent to the latter, or ſuppoſe a caſe where there are no motives to deceive, and where therefore the only ſource of mis-information from teſtimony is the danger of being deceived. Let us likewiſe ſuppoſe that this danger is ſuch as makes teſtimony liable to be wrong once in ten times. Now, I ſay, that ſuch teſtimony would communicate its own probability to *every* event reported by it of which ſenſe is *equally* a judge, whether the odds againſt that event, or the previous improbability in it is more or leſs.—For inſtance. A perſon, who in the dark ſhould take a black-ball out of a heap of 67 white-balls, and 33 black, would do what there were the odds of two to one againſt his doing. He, therefore, who ſhould report this, would report an event which was improbable as two to one; and a perſon who ſhould affirm that there was no improbability to be removed by the report, would affirm a palpable falſehood. Now, to this fact, the

the teſtimony I have ſuppoſed, would give the probability of *nine* to one, notwithſtanding its previous improbability. Such a teſtimony would do the ſame if its report was, that a black-ball had been in the ſame manner taken out of a heap containing 90 white-balls and ten black; or 99 white and one black. That is; it would afford equal evidence whether the improbability of the event was 2 to 1, 10 to 1, or 99 to 1.—The like will appear, if we ſuppoſe the reports of ſuch a teſtimony applied to the particular faces thrown with a ſet of dies. It would make no difference, whether its reports were applied to the faces thrown with a ſet of dies of 6 ſides or a thouſand ſides, or to any *different* faces thrown with them, or any *coincidence* of faces. Suppoſing any conſiderable number of ſuch reports, the nature of the thing implies, that an equal proportion of them would be found to be true in either caſe; becauſe, by ſuppoſition, however different the improbabilities are, the only cauſe of mis-information, namely the danger of a deception

deception of the ſenſes, does not operate more in one caſe than in the other.—In other words. The improbabilities I mean, being no hindrance to the perceptions of ſenſe, make no oppoſition to the teſtimony of a witneſs who reports honeſtly from ſenſe; and, therefore, ſaying that ſuch a teſtimony, though the probability of its own truth is but 9 to 1, will overcome equally an improbability of 2 to 1, 10 to 1, or 99 to 1, is no more than ſaying, that it is equally an over-match for any one of a number of things, by which it is not oppoſed.—In ſhort. TESTIMONY is truly no more than SENSE at ſecond-hand: and improbabilities, in the circumſtances now ſuppoſed, can have no more effect on the evidence of the one, than on the evidence of the other.

It is obvious that ſimilar obſervations might be made on the other cauſe which I have mentioned of falſehood in teſtimony. If in any caſe it cannot be ſuppoſed that a witneſs is deceived, his report will give an event

event that preciſe degree of probability which there is of his not intending to deceive, be the event what it will.

A due attention to theſe obſervations will, I think, ſhew the reaſon of the little effect which, in numberleſs inſtances, very great previous improbabilities have, when ſet againſt the weakeſt direct teſtimony. No one can be at a loſs to account for this where he has the evidence of *ſenſe*. It appears that there is no greater difficulty in accounting for it, where we have the evidence of *teſtimony*.

It ſhould be remembered, that nothing I have ſaid implies, that improbabilities ought never to have any influence on our opinion of teſtimony. Improbabilities, I have obſerved, *as ſuch*, do not affect the *capacity* of teſtimony to report truth. They have no *direct* and neceſſary operation upon it, and ſhould not be conſidered as a *counter-evidence* invalidating, in proportion to their degree, its reports. ——But tho' this is true, it by no means

follows, that they may not in many circumſtances affect the *credit* of teſtimony, or cauſe us to queſtion its veracity. They have ſometimes this effect on even the * reports of ſenſe, and, therefore, may alſo on the reports of teſtimony. This will happen, firſt, when they are of ſuch a nature as to carry the appearance of *impoſſibilities*. Every ſuch appearance is indeed properly a counter-evidence; and teſtimony, when applied in ſuch circumſtances, cannot gain credit any further than there is a greater probability of its truth, than there is of the impoſſibility of the

* Were we to *ſee* any thing very ſtrange and incredible, it would be natural at firſt to doubt whether our eyes did not deceive us. But if it appeared to us repeatedly, and for a length of time, and others ſaw the ſame, we ſhould ſoon be as well convinced of its reality, as of any other object of ſenſe.—The like is true in the caſe of *teſtimony*. If any thing reported to us is ſo ſtrange that we cannot truſt any ſingle witneſs ſo far as to believe it, the agreement of a number of independent witneſſes may produce ſuch an increaſe of evidence, as ſhall leave no more poſſibility of doubting about it than if we had been ourſelves witneſſes of it.

the fact. Thus; if I was to hear a report, that a perſon was in *one* place at a time when I apprehended him to be in *another*, I could not give my aſſent till it appeared, that I had leſs reaſon for thinking myſelf right in this apprehenſion, than for believing the report. The ſame is true in all caſes where ſeeming impoſſibilities or inconſiſtencies are reported. But, between *impoſſibilities* and *improbabilities*, however apt we may be to confound them, there is an infinite difference; and no concluſion can be drawn from the one to the other There are few of the moſt *incredible* facts that can, with any reaſon, be called *impoſſible*. With reſpect to *miracles*, particularly, there are no arguments which have a tendency to prove this concerning them; or were it even true, that there are ſuch arguments, their utmoſt effect, agreeably to the obſervation juſt made, would be, not to *deſtroy* the evidence of chriſtianity, but to *counter-balance* it; and there might be ſtill reaſon to believe chriſtianity,

unleſs it appeared that their force was ſuch as to *outweigh* the force of the evidence for it. Teſtimony ſometimes has convinced men of facts which they judged to be impoſſible; that is, it has convinced them that they were wrong in this opinion. Kindling ſpirits by a touch from ice would appear, to a common perſon, impoſſible. The evidence of ſenſe, however, would immediately convince him of the contrary; and from the preceding reaſoning, I think, it appears, that there is nothing which ſenſe is capable of proving that teſtimony may not alſo prove.

But, *Secondly*, The chief reaſon of the effect of improbabilities on our regard to teſtimony is, their tendency to influence the principles of deceit in the human mind. They have *of themſelves*, I have ſaid, no effect on the perceptions of ſenſe, and therefore none on any faithful reports from ſenſe. They may, however, *when perceived*, lead us to queſtion the faithfulneſs

fulneſs of a report, and give juſt ground to ſuſpect a deſign to miſrepreſent or exaggerate. A *given probability* of teſtimony communicates itſelf always entire to an event; but an event may be of ſuch a nature as to lead us to doubt, whether there is that probability or not. —My meaning here will be explained by the following conſiderations.

Whenever any particular improbabilities appear, or a fact has any thing of the air of the marvellous, the paſſions are neceſſarily engaged, and we know that a temptation to deceive takes place in order to draw attention and excite wonder. On the contrary; when a fact is ſuch as not at all to *intereſt*, or to give any room for imagining that men can intend deceit, we immediately believe it, without minding any previous improbabilities. It is for this reaſon, that we eaſily believe any ſtory of a common nature, however complicated, tho' improbable, when the ſupport of teſtimony is taken from it, almoſt as infinity to one.

But when a ſtory is told us, which is attended with any circumſtances not common, or in any way calculated to produce ſurprize, we place ourſelves on our guard, and very reaſonably give our aſſent with caution, becauſe we ſee that in this caſe there is room for fearing the operation of the principles of deceit.—Thus; were we to receive an account that number 1500 was the *firſt* drawn in a lottery, we ſhould immediately believe it; but were we to hear that number 1 was the *firſt* drawn, we ſhould heſitate and doubt, though the improbability of the event gives no more reaſon for heſitation in the one caſe than the other; it being certainly no more unlikely, that number 1 ſhould be *firſt* drawn, than number 1500.

Were we ſure in inſtances of this kind, that the ſtory which ſurprizes, and the ſtory which does not ſurprize, came to us from perſons who had no more thought of deceiving in one caſe than in the other, we ſhould in both caſes give our aſſent with equal

equal readineſs; and it would be unreaſonable to do otherwiſe. For inſtance; were a perſon to tell us that, in paſſing thro' Guildhall at the time of drawing a lottery, he happened to hear his age, the day of the month, and the date of the year drawn together, we ſhould ſcarcely believe him, tho' we know that he was not more unlikely to hear theſe numbers drawn, than any other particular numbers. But if the ſame perſon was only to tell us the numbers themſelves, and the co-incidence which ſtrikes us was entirely our own diſcovery, we ſhould have juſt the ſame reaſon for believing his account, as if there had been no ſuch co-incidence. In like manner; if before the beginning of drawing a lottery, we ſuppoſe a wager laid in a company, that a particular number ſhall be firſt drawn, and if afterwards one who only knows of the wager, without being any way intereſted in it, ſhould come and report to the company that he had heard that very number firſt drawn, he would not eaſily gain credit. But if a ſtranger,

ignorant of the wager, was to come accidentally, and to make the ſame report, he would be believed. The reaſon is obvious. It would appear that probably the laſt of theſe reporters had nothing but the reality of the fact to lead him to report this number rather than any other; whereas the contrary would appear to be true of the other.

Theſe obſervations may be applied to every caſe in which hiſtorical evidence is concerned. A *given* force of teſtimony never wants ability to produce belief proportioned to its degree; but the ſituation of reporters and the circumſtances of facts may be ſuch as may render us doubtful whether that *given force* is *really* applied. As far as it appears that there is no ground for any doubts of this kind, we are equally forced to believe in all caſes. Were we even to receive an account that a lottery had been drawn in the very order of the numbers, in a manner which gave us as little reaſon to

ſuſpect

ſuſpect the danger of miſtake and deceit, as there is when we are informed that it has been drawn in any other order, we ſhould be obliged to give our aſſent.

All that has been here aſſerted may be juſtly applied to the caſe of miracles reported by teſtimony.——Uncommon facts, *as ſuch*, are not leſs ſubject to the cognizance of *ſenſe* than the moſt ordinary. It is as competent a judge, for inſtance, of a man eight feet high, as of a man five or ſix feet high, and of the reſtoration of a withered limb, or the inſtantaneous cure of a diſeaſe, by ſpeaking a word, as of the amputation of a limb, or the gradual cure of a diſeaſe by the uſe of medicines: And were a ſet of ſuch facts to be related to us by eye and ear-witneſſes, who appeared no more to mean deceit than perſons in general do when they relate any thing of a common nature, we ſhould be under a neceſſity of believing them.—In particular; were there no more reaſon to queſtion the ſince-

rity

rity of the Apoſtles when they tell us, that they ſaw Jeſus perform his wonderful works, that they converſed with him familiarly for many days after his reſurrection, that he aſcended to heaven before their eyes, and that afterwards, in conſequence of being endued *with power from on high* agreeably to his promiſe, they went about through all the world preaching the doctrine of *eternal life through him*, and converting men from idolatry and vice, God himſelf bearing witneſs with them *by divers miracles, and wonders, and gifts of the Holy Ghoſt* *: Were there, I ſay, no more reaſon to queſtion the honeſty of the Apoſtles when they deliver this part of their hiſtory, than when they give an account of the affairs of the Jews and Romans, of the ignominious ſufferings and crucifixion of Chriſt under Pilate, of Peter's denial, Judas's treachery, and other events of a ſimilar nature, we ſhould be obliged alike to receive both.

This,

* Heb. ii. 4.——Rom. xv. 18, 19.

This, indeed, ſeems to me to be nearly the truth †. The *extraordinary* facts they relate are ſo blended with the *common*, and told with ſo much of the appearance of a like artleſs ſimplicity in both caſes, as has, I think, a ſtrong tendency to impreſs an attentive and impartial mind.

† "The Goſpels and the Acts afford us the ſame "hiſtorical evidence of the miracles of Chriſt and the "Apoſtles, as of the common matters related in "them. This indeed could not have been affirmed "by any reaſonable man, if the authors of theſe "books like many other hiſtorians had appeared to "aim at an entertaining manner of writing, tho' "they had in their works interſperſed miracles at pro-"per diſtances and on proper occaſions. Theſe might "have animated a dull relation, amuſed the reader, "and engaged his attention.——But the facts, "both miraculous and natural in ſcripture, are re-"lated in plain unadorned narratives; and both of "them appear in all reſpects to ſtand upon the ſame "foot of hiſtorical evidence." *Butler's Analogy*, Part II. Chap. 7.

SECT. III.

Of the Credibility of Miracles, and the Force of Teſtimony when employed to prove them.

IT has, I hope, been ſufficiently proved in the laſt ſection, that the influence of improbabilities on hiſtorical evidence is by no means ſuch as Mr. Hume aſſerts, and that there cannot be any ſuch incredibility in miracles as renders them incapable of being proved by teſtimony. We have ſeen that teſtimony is continually overcoming greater improbabilities than thoſe of its own falſehood, and that, like the evidence of *ſenſe*, the capacity of doing this is implied in its very nature.—The objection therefore, grounded on the ſuppoſed abſurdity of truſting a feebler experience in oppoſition to a ſtronger, or of believing

ing teſtimony, when it reports facts more improbable and extraordinary than falſehood and deception, is fallacious.

I muſt add what deſerves particular notice, that what has been ſaid ſhews us that Mr. Hume's argument would prove nothing even tho' one of the principles before oppoſed were granted, namely, that we derive our regard to teſtimony from experience in the ſame manner with our aſſurance of the laws and courſe of nature.

It is not neceſſary to the purpoſe of this Diſſertation that I ſhould proceed any further. The improbability, however, attending miracles being a point that ſtrongly affects the minds of many perſons, I cannot help entering a little further into the conſideration of it, in order to ſhew more fully how much it has been magnified, and with what propriety and effect teſtimony may be employed to gain credit to the ſupernatural facts of chriſtianity.—This ſhall be my buſineſs

buſineſs in the greateſt part of what remains of this Diſſertation.

There are many events, not miraculous, which yet have a previous incredibility in them ſimilar to that of miracles, and by no means inferior to it. The events I mean, are all ſuch *phænomena* in nature as are quite new and ſtrange to us. No one can doubt whether theſe are capable of full proof by teſtimony.——I could, for inſtance, engage by my own ſingle teſtimony to convince any reaſonable perſon, that I have known one of the human ſpecies, neither deformed nor an ideot, and only thirty inches high, who arrived at his moſt mature ſtate at ſeven years of age, and weighed then eighteen pounds; but from that time gradually declined, and died at ſeventeen, weighing only twelve pounds, and with almoſt every mark of old age upon him.——— Now, according to Mr. Hume's argument, no teſtimony can prove ſuch a fact; for it might be ſaid, that nothing being more

common than the falſehood of teſtimony, nor more *uncommon* than ſuch a fact, it muſt be contrary to all reaſon to believe it on the evidence of teſtimony.

It deſerves particular notice here, that in judging from experience concerning the probability of events, we ſhould always take care to ſatisfy ourſelves, that there is nothing wanting to render the caſes, from which we argue, perfectly alike. Our knowledge that an event has always or generally happened in certain circumſtances, gives no reaſon for believing that the ſame event will happen, when theſe circumſtances are altered; And, in truth, we are ſo ignorant of the conſtitution of the world and of the ſprings of events, that it is ſeldom poſſible for us to know what different *phænomena* may take place, on any the leaſt change in the ſituation of nature, or the circumſtances of objects. It was inattention to this that occaſioned the miſtake of that king of *Siam*, mentioned by Mr. *Locke*, who rejected, as utterly incredible,

incredible, the account which was given him of the effects of cold upon water in Europe. His unbelief was plainly the effect of ignorance. And this indeed is almoſt as often the caſe with unbelief, as with its contrary. Give to a common man an account of the moſt remarkable experiments in natural philoſophy: Tell him that you can *freeze* him to death by blowing warm air upon him before a good *fire*; or that you often divert yourſelf with bottling up lightning and diſcharging it thro' the bodies of your acquaintance; and he will perhaps look upon you as crazy, or, at leaſt, he will think himſelf ſure that you mean to deceive him. Could we ſuppoſe him to have adopted Mr. Hume's method of reaſoning, he might ſay, "That "what you acquaint him with is contrary "to uniform experience; that he cannot be- "lieve you without quitting a guide that "has never deceived him, to follow one "which is continually deceiving him; "and that, therefore, ſuch facts, when "reported by teſtimony, are more pro-

"perly

"perly ſubjects of *deriſion* than *argument*."
———But, how obvious would be the weakneſs of his reaſoning?—A perſon in ſuch circumſtances, who thought juſtly, would conſider how complicated and extenſive the frame of nature is, and how little a way his obſervations have reached. This would ſhew him that he can be no competent judge of the powers of nature, and lead him to expect to find in it things ſtrange and wonderful, and conſequently to enquire what regard is due to the teſtimony which informs him of ſuch facts, rather than haſtily to reject them.—One cannot help being greatly diſguſted with the inclination which ſhews itſelf in many perſons, to treat with contempt whatever they hear, be it ever ſo well atteſted, if it happens that they are not able to account for it, or that it does not coincide with their experience, juſt as if they knew all that can take place in nature, or as if their experience was the ſtandard of truth and the meaſure of poſſibility. This is to give themſelves up to the influence of a

principle which has a tendency to unfit them for ſociety, and, in effect, barring their minds againſt light and improvement. If we would be truly wiſe, we ought, at the ſame time that we are upon our guard againſt deception, to avoid carefully a vain ſcepticiſm, preſerving openneſs with reſpect to *any* evidence that can be offered to us on every ſubject, from a ſenſe of our own ignorance and narrow views.——But to come more directly to the ſubject under conſideration.

There is, I have ſaid, no greater incredibility in a miracle, than in ſuch facts as thoſe I have mentioned. It has been already ſhewn, p. 393, &c. that the moſt uniform experience affords no reaſon for concluding, that the courſe of nature will *never* be interrupted, or that any natural event which has hitherto happened, will *always* happen. It has appeared, on the contrary, that there muſt be always reaſon *againſt* this concluſion. There may, I have ſaid, be ſecret cauſes which will

will ſometimes counteract thoſe by which the courſe of nature is carried on. We are under no more neceſſity of thinking that it muſt be the ſame in all *ages* than in all *climates*. During the continuance of a world, there may be periods and emergencies in which its affairs may take a new turn, and very extraordinary events happen.——In particular, there are, for ought we know, ſuperior beings who may ſometimes interpoſe in our affairs, and over-rule the uſual operations of natural cauſes *. We are ſo far from having any reaſon to deny this, that if any end worthy of ſuch an interpoſition appears, nothing is more credible.—— There was, undoubtedly, a time when this earth was reduced into its preſent habitable ſtate and form. This muſt

 have

* Sure it is, that Mr. Hume, at leaſt, cannot diſpute the credibility of this, who has ſaid of the ſyſtem of pagan *mythology*, that it ſeems *more than probable* that ſomewhere or other in the univerſe, it is really carried into execution. *Natural Hiſtory of Religion*, Sect. 11th.

have been a time of miracles, or of the exertion of ſupernatural power. Why muſt this power have then ſo entirely withdrawn itſelf, as never to appear afterwards? The vaniſhing of old ſtars, and the appearance of new ones, is probably owing to the deſtruction of old worlds, and the creation of new worlds. It is reaſonable to believe that events of this kind are continually happening in the immenſe univerſe; and it is certain, that they muſt be brought about under the direction of ſome ſuperior power. There is, therefore, the conſtant exertion of ſuch power in the univerſe. Why muſt it be thought that, in the lapſe of ſix thouſand years, there have been no occaſions on which it has been exerted on our globe?

What I am now ſaying is true on the ſuppoſition that a miracle, according to the common opinion, implies a *violation* or *ſuſpenſion* of the laws of nature. But, in reality, this is by no means neceſſarily included

included in the idea of a miracle. A ſenſible and *extraordinary effect* produced by *ſuperior power*, no more implies that a law of nature is *violated*, than any *common effect* produced by *human power*. This has been explained in the diſſertation on Providence, p. 80, 81. and it has a conſiderable tendency to render the admiſſion of a miracle more eaſy.

Theſe obſervations demonſtrate, that there is nothing of the improbability in miracles which ſome have imagined. I may even venture to ſay, that they have in them a much leſs degree of improbability, than there was, antecedently to obſervations and experiments, in ſuch *phænomena* as *comets*, or ſuch powers as thoſe of *magnetiſm* and *electricity*. My reaſon for this aſſertion is, that it is far more likely that the courſe of nature ſhould ſome time or other fail, than that any particular powers or effects ſhould exiſt in nature, which we could before-hand gueſs.

A due attention to theſe arguments will neceſſarily diſpoſe a candid enquirer to give a patient hearing to any teſtimony which aſſures him, that there actually have been miracles. It appears that to decline this, under the pretence that nothing different from the common courſe of things can be proved by teſtimony, is extremely unreaſonable.—The miracles of the New Teſtament, in particular, have many circumſtances attending them which recommend them ſtrongly to our good opinion, and which lay us under indiſpenſable obligations to give the evidence for them a fair and patient examination.—Such is the ſtate of mankind, that there is nothing more credible, than that our affairs have not always been ſuffered to go on entirely of themſelves. A revelation to inſtruct and reform a ſinful and degenerate world is ſo far from implying any abſurdity, that it is an effect of divine goodneſs which might very reaſonably be hoped for. There appears to have been great need of it; and it ſeems to be certain, that there

muſt have been a revelation at the beginning of the world. If we reject the miracles mentioned in the New Teſtament, it will not be poſſible to give any tolerable account of the eſtabliſhment of ſuch a religion as the chriſtian among mankind, by a few perſons of no education or learning, in oppoſition to all the prejudices and powers of the world. The excellence of the end for which they were wrought; the myriads of mankind which they brought over to piety and goodneſs, and the amazing turn they gave to the ſtate of religion by deſtroying, in a few years, a ſyſtem of idolatry which had been the work of ages, and eſtabliſhing on its ruins the knowledge and worſhip of the one true God; theſe, and various other undeniable facts which might be enumerated, give them a high credibility. We ſee here an occaſion worthy of the uſe of ſuch means, and a probability that, if ever ſince the creation there has been any interpoſition of ſuperior power, this was the time.

CONCLUSION.

Enough has been now ſaid in anſwer to the objection which has been the chief ſubject of this diſſertation *. The neceſſary con-

* Some of the principal obſervations which I have made may be found in the chapter of Biſhop *Butler's Analogy* on the *ſuppoſed preſumption againſt a Revelation, conſidered as miraculous.* Had I remembered this, it is probable I ſhould not have thought of drawing up this diſſertation. The greateſt part of the paſſage I refer to I ſhall here give, in order to ſave the reader the trouble of turning to it, and alſo to enable him to judge how far what I have writ, ſhould it anſwer no other end, may be of uſe to illuſtrate and ſtrengthen what this excellent author has ſaid.

"Firſt of all, there is a very ſtrong preſumption "againſt common ſpeculative truths, and againſt the "moſt ordinary facts before the proof of them, "which yet is overcome by almoſt any proof. There "is a preſumption of millions to one againſt the ſtory "of Cæſar, or any other man. For, ſuppoſe a num-"ber of common facts ſo and ſo circumſtanced, of "which one had no kind of proof, ſhould happen to "come into one's thoughts, every one would, with-"out any poſſible doubt, conclude them to be falſe.

"And

conclusion from it is, that the main business of those who oppose christianity should

" And the like may be said of a single common fact. " And from hence it appears, that the question of " importance, as to the matter before us, is concerning " the degree of the peculiar presumption supposed " against miracles; not whether there be any pre- " sumption at all against them. For, if there be the " presumption of millions to one against the most " common facts; what can a small presumption, " additional to this, amount to, though it be pecu- " liar? It cannot be estimated, and is as nothing. " The only material question is, whether there be " any such presumption against miracles, as to ren- " der them in any sort incredible. *Secondly*, If we " leave out the consideration of religion, we are in " such total darkness upon what causes, occasions, " reasons or circumstances the present course of " nature depends, that there does not appear any " improbability for or against supposing, that five or " six thousand years may have given scope for causes, " occasions, reasons or circumstances, from whence " miraculous interpositions may have arisen. And " from this, joined with the foregoing observation, " it will follow, that there must be a presumption, " beyond all comparison greater, against the *par-* " *ticular* common facts just now instanced in, than " against miracles *in general*, before any evidence " of

ſhould be, to invalidate the *direct* evidence for it. Every attempt of this kind would deſerve

"of either. But, *thirdly*, take in the conſideration "of religion, or the moral ſyſtem of the world, and "then we ſee diſtinct particular reaſons for mira- "cles; to afford mankind inſtruction, additional to "that of nature, and to atteſt the truth of it.— "*Laſtly*, Miracles muſt not be compared to com- "mon natural events, but to the extraordinary phæ- "nomena of nature. And then the compariſon will "be between the preſumption againſt miracles, and "the preſumption againſt ſuch uncommon appear- "ances, ſuppoſe, as comets, and againſt there "being any ſuch powers in nature as magnetiſm and "electricity, ſo contrary to the properties of other "bodies, not endued with theſe powers.—Upon "all this, I conclude, that there is certainly no ſuch "preſumption againſt miracles as to render them in "any wiſe incredible. That, on the contrary, our "being able to diſcern reaſons for them gives a poſi- "tive credibility to the hiſtory of them, in caſes where "thoſe reaſons hold: And that it is by no means "certain, that there is any peculiar preſumption "at all, from analogy, againſt miracles, as diſtin- "guiſhed from other extraordinary phænomena." *Analogy of Religion*, &c. p. 243, &c.

Since the firſt publication of theſe Diſſertations, what is ſaid in this paſſage of "the improbability in common

deſerve the moſt ſerious regard; and, it is vain to think of overthrowing chriſtianity

common facts," has been controverted by perſons of whoſe judgment I have reaſon to entertain a high opinion. I muſt, therefore, beg leave here to recal the reader's attention to this ſubject, by laying before him ſome further obſervations upon it. Thoſe who are already ſatisfied, and to whom probably, in what follows, I ſhall appear too minute and tedious, will, I hope, excuſe me.

In order to diſcover whether there is an improbability in common facts, independently of the teſtimony on whoſe credit they are believed, let the connexion of ſuch facts with teſtimony be withdrawn, and then let it be conſidered what they are. If upon doing this; that is, if upon making them objects of imagination unſupported by any proof, they become improbable, the point, I ſhould think, will be determined: For to find that a fact, when its connexion with teſtimony is withdrawn, becomes improbable, is the ſame as to find, that, independently of teſtimony, it *is* improbable. A fact reported by teſtimony, if it has in itſelf no improbability, will continue to have no improbability when the ſupport of teſtimony is taken away. This is true of ſuch a fact as that it froze in England between the 1ſt and 10th of laſt January; but the contrary is true of ſuch facts as that the king was then ill, or that the miniſtry was then changed, and ſuch and ſuch perſons advanced to power.

anity in any other way. As far as there is reaſon to believe, that the Apoſtles were neither

power.——I cannot conceive of any clearer way of deciding any point than this is. However, as to ſome it is not ſatisfactory, let us conſider this point in other lights, taking along with us the following definitions and propoſitions.

Definition 1ſt. An event is *probable*, when the odds *for* its happening are greater than thoſe *againſt* its happening; *improbable*, when the odds *againſt* are greater than thoſe *for*; and neither *probable* nor *improbable* when theſe odds are equal.—This is the proper ſenſe of theſe words; but the writers on the *doctrine of chances* uſe the word *probable* in a more general ſenſe.

Definition 2d. Two events are *independent*, when the happening of one of them has no influence on the other.

Propoſition 1ſt. The improbabilities of *independent* events are the ſame whether they are conſidered *jointly* or *ſeparately*. That is; the improbability of an event remains the ſame, whether any other event which has no influence upon it happens at the ſame time with it, or not. This is ſelf-evident.

Propoſition 2d. The *improbability* that two independent events, each of them not improbable, ſhould both happen, cannot be greater than the odds of *three* to *one*; this being the odds that two equal chances ſhall not both happen; and an equal chance being the loweſt event

neither deceived, nor intended to deceive, we are under a neceſſity of receiving the facts

event of which it can be ſaid that it is not improbable. Thus, in throwing up a half-penny, I have an equal chance for turning up *heads*. Another alſo, in doing this at the ſame time, has an equal chance for turning up heads. It is *improbable* that we ſhould both of us turn up heads, and this improbability is the odds of *three* to one. If two events are in any degree *probable*, there is not ſo much as theſe odds againſt their co-incidence.

From theſe premiſes will ariſe a *demonſtration* that common facts, or (to ſpeak more properly) particular facts of a common nature, have a very high improbability in them which is conquered by teſtimony. For, in order to be ſufficiently explicit, let us take the two following facts: "The laying of a wager that "number 1500 ſhall be firſt drawn in a lottery;" and "the actual drawing of that number firſt." Theſe are independent events; for laying the wager cannot of itſelf have any influence on the *probability* or *improbability* of drawing the number about which it is laid. They are alſo, when taken ſeparately, common facts, and would either of them, if reported ſeparately, be believed without ſcruple on common teſtimony. When reported together; that is, when it is ſaid that they have both happened, every one is neceſſarily ſenſible of an improbability, and that this improbability is at leaſt 49,999 to 1, ſuppoſing

facts to which they gave witneſs, tho' miraculous. Let then unbelievers prove, if

ing the number of tickets in the lottery to be 50,000. But, by propoſition 2d, there could not be a greater improbability in the happening of both theſe events (if ſeparately not improbable) than the odds of 3 to 1. It follows, therefore, with the ſtricteſt evidence, that this is a falſe ſuppoſition.

Let us next conſider what the degree of this *ſeparate improbability* muſt be.—It appears that at leaſt it muſt be ſo great as to be capable of producing an improbability of 49,999 to 1 in the happening of both events. But it is obvious that, after the wager, this is the improbability of *one* of the events, or of drawing number 1500; and by propoſition 1ſt, if it has this improbability *after* the wager, it muſt have had it *before*. 49,999 to 1, therefore, was the *ſeparate* improbability of this event; that is, it is the improbability of it when reported by itſelf, and independently of its having been before-hand named. And there being no reaſon to think that the improbability in the other event, or in laying a wager about this particular number, is not at leaſt equal, the reſulting improbability that *both* ſhould happen, muſt, according to the laws of chance, be 2599².999,999 to 1.

Further. This point may be otherwiſe proved thus. The ſame event cannot be both improbable and not improbable at the ſame time. Different perſons in judging of the ſame event will form the ſame judgment, as far as they judge rightly. Suppoſe then that

two

if it be poſſible, that there is no ſufficient reaſon to believe this. Let them ſhew, that

two different perſons are told ſuch a common fact as that number 1500 was firſt drawn in a lottery, one of whom knows that a wager had been laid about it, or that it had been before-hand named, and the other knows nothing of any circumſtance of this kind. The former would judge the event improbable, and the latter would be ſenſible of no improbability in it. Which of theſe perſons judges rightly? the former without doubt. There was indeed an improbability that this number ſhould be drawn: and it makes no difference, that one man happens to be in circumſtances that force him to perceive it, and another not. That this number happened to be named before-hand, no more affects the improbability of drawing it, than that I yeſterday writ a letter or took a walk; and the improbability of drawing it after being ſo named, is no more than the improbability of drawing any other *particular* number. So true is this, that were two witneſſes apparently of equal credit to report, one that this number had been drawn, and the other that another had been drawn, there would not ariſe the leaſt reaſon, merely from the improbability that the number ſhould be drawn which had been named, for any preference of one report to the other. Suppoſe a trial at law about the number firſt drawn, and one witneſs to depoſe that number 1500 had been firſt drawn, and another, number 1600, how ridiculous

that Chriſt and his Apoſtles were either *enthuſiaſts* or *impoſtors*, and account for their

culous would it be to alledge as a circumſtance rendering one of the depoſitions leſs likely to be true than the other, that ſome time ago, and unknown to the witneſſes, there had been a wager laid about drawing the former number?

In the latter end of the preceding ſection I have aſſigned the reaſon of the greater reluctance with which, after being previouſly named, we ſhould believe that number 1500 had been drawn than any other. It is only when the reporter is known to be acquainted with this circumſtance, that there would be any reaſon for ſuch reluctance.—In caſes where there appears any ſtriking co-incidence, we are led to entertain a diſtruſt of teſtimony, or to apprehend that it wants the probability it would otherwiſe have, on account of the temptation which there is in ſuch caſes to deceive. Where we ſee nothing of this kind, we at once receive its reports without regarding improbabilities. On the contrary; where any circumſtance appears which may be the foundation of a deſign to deceive, we receive its reports with almoſt equal diffidence, whether the improbabilities are little or great: And it is on this account that, in many caſes, we are much affected with particular improbabilities, though in others we are not at all ſenſible of equal or greater improbabilities.—I do not know how

their conduct and writings on one of thoſe ſuppoſitions, taking along with them the

how better to illuſtrate this than in the following manner.

Suppoſe a heap of 1000 bits of *white* paper, marked with the numbers 1, 2, 3, &c. up to 1000, with one *black* paper among them. Were it reported that out of ſuch a heap a perſon had drawn the firſt trial the white paper marked 512, we ſhould eaſily aſſent without *minding*, or even *ſeeing* any improbability. But were it reported, in the ſame manner, that the black paper had been drawn, we ſhould heſitate, and think what we heard improbable. Now, the improbability in both caſes is the ſame; and, there being no more danger of a deception of *ſenſe* in one caſe than in the other, the true reaſon of the difference muſt be, agreeably to what I have obſerved, that in the former caſe, we ſee nothing that can be a foundation for a deſign to deceive, number 512 having nothing in it to recommend it to a preference; whereas in the latter caſe we ſee the contrary. For this reaſon we ſhould, in like manner, give a readier aſſent to a report that number 512 had been drawn than number 1, or any other number which ſeemed to have any thing diſtinguiſhing in it that could tend to prejudice the mind in its favour. And for this reaſon alſo, we ſhould believe an account that this number had been drawn out of ſuch a heap, more readily than that a

the conſideration, how *wild* and *frantick* they muſt have been if the former, and how

black paper had been drawn out of a heap of only ten white and one black, tho' the improbability in the one caſe is a hundred times greater than in the other. ——It is thus chiefly, in my opinion, we are to account for the difference in our regard to the reports of teſtimony, and for our being determined in ſuch caſes, much more by ſome particular circumſtances in facts than by any intrinſic improbabilities which they have. ——Were a perſon to tell us that in throwing *ſix* common dies together, he had thrown the *ſix* numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, our aſſent would be gained with ſome difficulty, though the improbability of doing this is only 64 to 1. But were the ſame perſon to tell us any ſtory of a common and unintereſting nature, we ſhould receive it without ſcruple, though perhaps, on account of the variety of particular circumſtances in it, previouſly improbable in a higher degree than can well be computed.—As *ſenſe*, wherever it is equally free from the danger of deception, convinces equally of an event, whatever its improbabilities are: As, for inſtance, it convinces equally that a black paper has been drawn out of a heap of white papers, whether the chance againſt it was a hundred, a thouſand, or a million to one; ſo likewiſe does *teſtimony*, unleſs there appears ſomething that may be likely to give occaſion to deceit.

how *profane* and *abandoned* if the latter. But let them not pretend that they are able to

In what I have ſaid, I have all along kept to the proper ſenſe of the word *improbable*, as it has been defined at the beginning of this note. But it is generally uſed with ſuch laxneſs and ambiguity, as cannot but miſlead us, if we are not attentive.—Were we to be told that there was a ſtorm of thunder and lightning at ſuch a place in the month of July, we ſhould ſay that it was not *improbable*. And we ſhould ſay the ſame, were we to hear that it happened on ſuch a day, at ſuch an hour, and that ſuch and ſuch perſons were killed: In both caſes meaning only in general, that events of this kind frequently happened, and that there was no reaſon to conſider them as *incredible*. But if we aimed at ſpeaking with ſtrict propriety, we ſhould uſe different language; for, if a ſtorm of thunder in July is only not improbable, that is, an event not more unlikely to happen than not; a ſtorm on ſuch a day, and at ſuch an hour, doing ſuch and ſuch particular damages, is an event of which the contrary muſt be true.—In like manner; ſhould we be told that ſuch a perſon had got the 10,000l. prize in the lottery, it might be ſaid that it was not *improbable*, meaning that as ſome perſon muſt have it, we can eaſily believe that this perſon has had it: not that there were no odds againſt his having it; for all know that there muſt have been very great odds againſt his having it, though a

to prove *a priori*, that no accounts of miracles *can* be true; or ſatisfy themſelves with ſaying

report which comes through a hundred hands, and for the truth of which perhaps the odds are very inconſiderable, would convince us that he really has had it. Should it be added, that he had but one ticket, we ſhould receive the report as readily as if we knew he had 20, though this makes a great difference in the improbability of the event.

Theſe obſervations, I hope, may be of uſe to explain and confirm thoſe which have been made before on the nature of *Hiſtorical Evidence*. It ſeems to follow from them undeniably, that the previous improbabilities of events do by no means affect the credit of teſtimony in the manner implied in Mr. *Hume*'s argument. The poſition, therefore, on which this argument is founded, cannot be maintained. In order to gain aſſent to a report, it is not neceſſary that there ſhould be greater probability or odds *for* its truth, than *againſt* the happening of the event.

There is a very ſtrong preſumption againſt the ſimpleſt common ſtory before any evidence for it. On the contrary; againſt miracles *in general* there is no preſumption at all; for it has been proved that we have no reaſon for thinking that the courſe of nature will continue always the ſame. Miracles, therefore, *in general*, are in the ſtricteſt ſenſe, *not improbable*. That is; it is as likely as not, that ſome time or other, during the continuance of a world, the uſual operations

ſaying lazily, that deceit and falſehood are very *common*, and miracles very *extraordinary*; and that, therefore, the whole queſtion is decided, and there can be no occaſion for any further examination. A perſon who ſhould reaſon in this manner, in other inſtances, would be quite ridiculous. Teſtimony is an evidence which admits of an infinite variety of degrees, and which, ſometimes, is ſcarcely ſhort of demonſtration. Tho' it often deceives, yet there are ſome kinds of it that have never deceived, and that cannot deceive. It is one of the principal ſources of all our

 information

rations of phyſical cauſes ſhould, in ſome inſtances, fail, and ſupernatural power interpoſe. And with reſpect to *particular* miracles, or miracles ſaid to have been wrought at *ſuch* a time, and attended with ſuch and ſuch particular circumſtances, they are capable of being proved by teſtimony in the ſame manner with any other *particular* facts. And if it is any proof of the contrary, that they are more improbable and extraordinary than it is that the reports of teſtimony ſhould be falſe, there is likewiſe a proof, that we ought not to believe teſtimony when it reports numberleſs facts, which every one in the common courſe of life is continually ready to believe without difficulty on its credit.

information and knowledge. To argue, therefore, againſt chriſtianity from the general topic of the commonneſs of falſe teſtimony, is trifling and unjuſt, unleſs it can be ſhewn, that it has been common for *ſuch* teſtimony as that of the *apoſtles* to be falſe *. Hiſtorical evidence being of all

* It has appeared in this Diſſertation, that the objection, which is the main ſubject of it, is applicable to facts for which we have the evidence of *ſenſe*, as well as thoſe which depend on the evidence of *teſtimony*. Were we to be eye-witneſſes to any thing quite new to us, and out of the uſual courſe of nature, it might be ſaid, that what we perceive being contradictory to uniform experience, but deceptions of our ſenſes common; therefore, it muſt be wrong to believe the reality of it; becauſe, this would be truſting a feebler experience in oppoſition to a ſtronger, or, receiving a fact upon an evidence, the falſehood of which would be leſs uncommon than the fact itſelf. He, therefore, that will guide himſelf by the principles which are the foundation of this objection, and balance oppoſite experiences in the manner it requires, muſt have been an unbeliever, though he had *ſeen* the miracles related in the New Teſtament. ——Though our ſenſes have often deceived us, we cannot help relying, in general, without diffidence on their information. There are innumerable circumſtances

all degrees, what is true of *other* hiſtorical evidence is nothing to *this*. If the facts are extraordinary, there may be peculiar circumſtances attending them taking off all improbability from them on this account; and it may be even leſs wonderful that they ſhould be true, than that the teſtimony reporting them ſhould be falſe. It has been ſhewn indeed, that, in order to our reception of the chriſtian miracles, it is by no means neceſſary to prove this. A great deal, however, has been ſaid to prove it with much ſtrength of reaſon, by

circumſtances and inſtances in which they have never deceived us: And, therefore, when in any particular inſtance they convey to us any information, it is trifling to object, that they have informed us wrong in ſome *other* inſtances, except thoſe other inſtances were of a ſimilar nature. And even ſuppoſing the ſimilarity, the objection will be of little weight, unleſs the number of ſuch inſtances in which they have deceived us, is nearly equal to or greater than thoſe in which they have not deceived us.—It has been ſhewn that theſe obſervations are applicable, with like propriety and force, to the information we receive from teſtimony.

the defenders of Chriſtianity *. Why ſhould not ſome notice be taken of the argu-

* See Dr. Adams's Eſſay on Miracles.—When Mr. *Hume*, in a paſſage before quoted, p. 387, lays it down as a *maxim*, "That no teſtimony is ſufficient to "eſtabliſh a miracle, unleſs the falſehood of it is more "miraculous than the fact it endeavours to eſtabliſh;" his meaning, I ſhould think, muſt be, that as, according to him, no teſtimony is ſufficient to prove an *ordinary* fact, unleſs its falſehood is *improbable* in a higher degree than the fact is improbable, in the caſe of a *miraculous* fact the falſehood of the teſtimony muſt be *miraculous* in a higher degree than the fact is *miraculous*: that is, it muſt be *certain*, that there is no other account to be given of the falſehood of the teſtimony, beſides a miraculous deception of the ſenſes and ſubverſion of the faculties of the perſons who give it. We ſhould not, therefore, be able to convince Mr. *Hume* of the truth of chriſtianity, though we could prove *to a demonſtration*, that the apoſtles did not intend to deceive, and were not themſelves deceived except miracles were employed to deceive them. It muſt be further proved to him, that a miraculous deception of their ſenſes and ſubverſion of their faculties would be *greater* miracles than the facts they atteſt. At this rate, agreeably to what was obſerved in the laſt note, it is plain, that had we ourſelves *ſeen* the miracles of Chriſt and his apoſtles, we muſt have been entirely doubtful about

arguments they offer? Why ſhould not thoſe who reject chriſtianity tell us, in particu-

about them, unleſs we were perſuaded that a deception of our ſenſes required a greater exertion of ſupernatural power, than the reality of what we ſaw.—Surely, an argument that proves ſo much cannot have any real weight. If juſt, we are under a neceſſity of concluding, that there is no reaſon to believe the reality of any thing we hear, ſee or feel in any other ſenſe, than as an *idea* or *mode of perception* in our minds. This, however, cannot ſtartle Mr. Hume; for it is the very concluſion to which his philoſophy carries us, and which, in his *Treatiſe on Human Nature* and *Philoſophical Eſſays*, he has, with an ingenuity that diſtinguiſhes all his writings, taught us to draw.

I hope I ſhall be excuſed if I give room here to an obſervation which is a little foreign to the preſent purpoſe.—It has been objected, that ſuppoſing the reality of the miraculous facts of chriſtianity, there is no connexion between them and the truth of its doctrines. This, in my opinion, is to trifle inexcuſably; nor can it be worth any chriſtian's while to ſay a word in anſwer to it, till *one* perſon is found who can honeſtly declare, that he believes the miracles of Chriſt, but denies his divine miſſion; that, in particular, he is convinced that he raiſed ſeveral perſons from the dead, and at laſt roſe himſelf from the dead and aſcended to heaven, and afterwards poured forth

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particular, how they account for the rapid progreſs it made in the world; for the manner in which St. Paul mentions the miraculous gifts in his epiſtles; and for the fortitude with which the apoſtles, in giving their teſtimony, ſacrificed every worldly intereſt, and at laſt laid down their lives? Why, inſtead of making any attempts of this kind, do they, in general, inſiſt on topicks which affect not the *direct* evidence, or found their objections on the adulterations of chriſtianity by human inventions and civil eſtabliſhments, without taking pains to diſcover what it is as it lies in the New Teſtament?

If the chriſtian religion is true, we have clear information on points the moſt intereſting.

on the apoſtles and firſt chriſtians thoſe gifts of the ſpirit mentioned in the New Teſtament; but, at the ſame time, doubts whether he ſaid true when he declared, that he was the *reſurrection and the life*; *that all power was given him in heaven and earth*; *and that the hour would come, when all that are in their graves ſhould hear his voice and come forth, they that have done good to the reſurrection of life, and they that have done evil to the reſurrection of damnation.* John xi. 25.—Ver. 28, 29.

reſting. A vicious man has *every thing* to fear, and a virtuous man *every thing* to hope. The queſtion, therefore, whether it is of divine original, is, as I obſerved at the beginning of this diſſertation, of unſpeakable importance. It is inexcuſable to treat it with indifference; or, with conceited half-thinkers, to ſuffer ourſelves to be led into infidelity by a few ſpecious difficulties, without critically examining the original code itſelf, and conſidering carefully the joint force of all the evidences *internal*, *external* and *preſumptive* taken together. If, after ſuch an examination, any perſon ſhould judge, that the whole amount of the evidence is inadequate to the proof of the facts on which chriſtianity is founded, he ought next to conſider how far it goes towards proving them. That it goes ſome way towards this is abſolutely certain. The furtheſt that any enquirer can go in his rejection of chriſtianity is, to think that the objections outweigh the evidence; but he cannot poſſibly think that there is *no* evidence. I

ſhould

ſhould imagine indeed, that he cannot poſſibly avoid ſeeing, that there is very conſiderable and ſtriking evidence, though he may judge it *inſufficient*. It is not conceivable, that any one can read the New Teſtament, and obſerve with what a force and purity, before unknown, it teaches morality and natural religion; the ſublime and ſingular character it has drawn, without the leaſt appearance of art or effort, in the hiſtory it gives of the life, diſcourſes and Miracles of Jeſus Chriſt; and the ſpirit of piety, goodneſs, love and heavenly mindedneſs which breathes through all its parts: It is not, I ſay, conceivable, that any perſon after ſuch a peruſal of the New Teſtament can be able eaſily to perſuade himſelf, that the writers of it were ſuch *miracles* of madneſs or profligacy, as they muſt have been, if the facts to which they bore teſtimony were falſe, and the religion they taught an impoſition on mankind.—But not to dwell on this. For the reaſon which has been aſſigned it is certain, that no infidels, who are inquiſitive and candid,

did, can go beyond a ſtate of doubt. They muſt acknowledge that, at leaſt, there is evidence enough to give a chance for the truth of chriſtianity, and they ought to conſider ſeriouſly to what this chance amounts, and what obligations, in reſpect of practice, their own ſtate of doubt lays them under. Would they do this, they could never make chriſtianity a ſubject of ridicule or contempt. Though not convinced of its truth, they would live under the apprehenſion that it may poſſibly prove true. Thoſe who do not act thus cannot reaſonably complain of the threatnings denounced in the ſcriptures againſt infidelity. Theſe threatnings certainly ſhould not be applied, nor were they ever intended to be applied to any honeſt enquirers, be their doubts what they will. Nothing is *fundamental* beſides a ſincere deſire to know and practiſe truth and right, or an honeſt and good heart. Speculative errors can be no further *criminal*, than they proceed from *criminal* diſpoſitions, and are made ſanctuaries

tuaries for vice. The unbelief condemned in the *New Teſtament* is only that which has this ſource, as our Lord has himſelf expreſsly told us. John iii. 18, 19. *He that believeth not is condemned already, becauſe he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation,* the reaſon of the condemnation, *that light is come into the world, and men love darkneſs rather than light, becauſe their deeds are evil. For every one who doth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, leſt his deeds ſhould be reproved.*——How far theſe words are applicable to any *modern* infidels they themſelves only are capable of determining. There is a wide difference between the ſtate of things now, and in the times of Chriſt and his Apoſtles.——The favourableneſs of chriſtianity to virtue muſt indeed be a powerful recommendation of it to good minds; and is almoſt enough, without the aid of miracles, to prove its heavenly original. For this reaſon, thoſe who *do the will of God are*

likely *to know of the doctrine whether it be of God* *. Nothing is much more incredible than that a religion ſo calculated to raiſe our affections above this world, and to lead us to all that is holy and worthy, ſhould be the offspring of ſuch wickedneſs as that of its firſt preachers muſt have been, if they were impoſtors.—But whatever effect conſiderations of this kind have upon me, I am far from thinking that it is neceſſary they ſhould have the ſame effect upon *others*. The difficulties which all inquiſitive and candid chriſtians muſt themſelves feel, may undoubtedly appear to even good minds in ſo ſtrong a light, as to leave them unſatisfied. It would be much better, if chriſtians, inſtead of being ſo free as they often are in aſcribing infidelity to the worſt motives, would take care that their own faith is the reſult of honeſt enquiry, and at the ſame time ſtudy to demonſtrate the excellence of their religion by the excellence of their tempers and lives. Would to

* John vii. 17.